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MAY 1995



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Amazing® Stories,  
ISSN 0096-1706, is  
published bimonthly by  
TSR, Inc., (201 Sheridan  
Spring Road) P.O. Box  
110, Lake Geneva, WI  
53147. Single copy price  
\$1.75, plus 75 cents  
postage and handling.  
Subscription rates: \$9.00  
for 6 issues (one year) sent  
to U.S. or Canadian  
addresses. For all other  
countries, subscription  
rates are \$25.00 for  
surface mail or \$30.00 for  
air mail of 6 issues.  
Note: All subscrip-  
tions must be paid in  
advance in U.S. funds  
only. All subscription  
requests should be sent to  
TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 72088,  
Chicago IL 60670.

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Inc., P.O. Box 110, Lake  
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# AMAZING®

## STORIES

MAY 1986

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# Opinion

by Robert Silverberg

---

"Dear Mr. Silverberg:

"I am 16 years old [or 18, or 57] and I want to write more than anything in the world. Please tell me how to go about it. Thank you." Sometimes, but not always, the letter goes on to say, "I enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope."

I get such letters all the time. Every reasonably well known professional writer does. Usually I don't answer them, even the ones that do enclose stamped, self-addressed envelopes, because if I did, I'd have no time left over to do anything else. I sometimes think that everybody on this planet wants to write, except some of those who already are writers and wish they were almost anything else. (Cf. Robert Silverberg's Retirement Address, 1975: "I will never write for publication again," or words to that effect.) There's another reason why I rarely reply to such letters, aside from the fact that my time is finite: the sense of futility that smites me when I hear someone say, "I want to write." Silverberg's First Law of Writing holds that people who merely want to write aren't ever going to. Either you are a writer or you aren't; and if you are, you're already writing. You may be writing badly, but you're doing it. Do you think the young Harlan Ellison went around telling people he wanted to write? Isaac Asimov? Norman Spinrad? Ray Bradbury? Ursula Le Guin? Frederik Pohl? Nah. All those people, once they realized that the manipulation of words was the task for

which they had been designed, immediately sat down and started writing. I began turning out stories when I was seven, and I'd be astonished if any of the others I've just named got a much later start. There may be some well-known writer who didn't begin writing for his own pleasure almost as soon as he learned how to read — Robert A. Heinlein, maybe, since he had a career in the Navy before he became a writer — but there can't be many. The corollary of Silverberg's First Law holds that anyone whom the gods designed to be a writer starts producing fiction long before anyone else in the world thinks he has the slightest bit of aptitude for the job — usually in early childhood.

That takes care of the people who "want to write" but somehow never do any writing because they're waiting around to learn the magic secret. But then there are those who say they want to be writers. That's different. They're already writing; now they want to know how to make a career out of it. When I encounter these people — and usually it's in person, not by letter — I generally offer them Silverberg's Three Rules for Literary Success:

1. Read a lot.
2. Write a lot.
3. Read a lot more, write a lot more.

That's all there is to it, folks. The true writer immerses himself in the printed word hours a day. He can't possibly satiate his appetite for words. He gobbles stories in carload lots. But he doesn't just read them; he dissects

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BY

**MARTIN CAIDIN**

AUTHOR OF *MAROONED*,  
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*THE LAST COMMAND*



them. Analyzes the number of incidents per thousand words, measures the ratio of dialog to exposition, studies the manner of opening a story and the way of closing it. He looks at the way characters are named and the way objects are described. In the process he tends to surrender some of the innocent joy of reading for its own sake, but that's part of the price of admission to the trade.

Of course, the would-be writer doesn't just read fiction. He reads everything. He reads the newspapers, he reads *Scientific American*, he reads *Playboy*, he reads accounts of voyages to Antarctica and the Himalayas and Jersey City, he reads biographies, he reads treatises on snail-farming and city planning and medieval dentistry. There's no telling what sort of information will come in handy. Alexandre Damas the elder, one of the most productive writers who ever lived, used the metaphor of the writer as pitcher: You fill and fill and fill yourself with everything you can, until the pitcher is full; and then you begin to pour.

I know no writers who are not also insatiable and omnivorous readers.

And having read, the beginner writes. Unceasingly. Ray Bradbury, when he was starting out, wrote a story a day. I scribbled awful little "novels" in my school copybooks when I should have been listening to the teacher. Ellison, you betcha, was doing the same thing, and so were all the rest of us. At first the fledgling writer imitates whatever has pleased him most, which is why so many ten-year-olds write their own sequels to *Huckleberry Finn* or *The Wizard of Oz* or *Star Wars* or whatever. That's all right. That's a completely legitimate way to begin. Even merely typing out someone else's published story

yourself can help, as long as you don't try submitting it to a magazine; manuscripts have very different textures from piloted stories, and it's useful to learn the difference at an early age. Later on will come a different phase of the imitative period, when the beginner simply borrows the style of a favorite writer and uses it in a story of his own invention — picking up the voice of Jack Vance, let's say, or Paul Anderson, or J. G. Ballard. And then, after that, at some magical point, the voice you use becomes your own voice; and then you are a writer.

That's all there is to it. Read a lot, to fill yourself with a torrent of knowledge and to make yourself aware of the techniques by which other writers have achieved their effects; and write a lot, so that by daily practice of the craft you achieve the ability to gain and hold the attention of readers. And then do more of both, until writing becomes second nature. If the talent is there — and probably it is, if you have committed yourself to the disciplines of the art — then nothing more than immense work is required to turn yourself into a professional writer.

Is that all, you say? No other advice except read and write?

Well, there are a few trivial things to know, too, like typing your manuscripts on one side of the page, double spaced, using a dark ribbon. Editors tend to think that a story that looks drab and gray is probably drab and gray, and there isn't much market for drab, gray stories unless you're a genius of the order of Samuel Beckett. (And even he hasn't won any Hugos.) Stay away from dot-matrix printers, too, and enclose return postage, and don't include a letter with your manuscript that tells the editor how good it is, or what it really means, or how much your uncle, who's a professor of

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literature at Texas A & M, thinks of it. But everybody, even beginners, knows that list of dos and don'ts, I suspect.\* The key to success lies in just two things: Read until your eyes go blurry, write until your fingers ache. Every day, without fail, until you think you know what you're doing, and even when you do know what you're doing, don't stop learning how to do it better. Ever. The moment a writer stops growing, he starts to shrink.

One more thing you ought to know, though, before you set out to become a writer. Silverberg's Second Law:

*Once a writer, always a writer.*

There's no escape.

It's a life sentence, folks. Writers don't retire. They may take vacations, but they don't quit. You could ask Robert A. Heinlein: he's 79, I think, and just starting a new book. You could ask Jack Williamson: he's just finished one, and he's 78. Why, you could even ask me. I retired from writing forever in 1974, with my fortieth birthday in sight. I told everyone who'd listen that I was never going to commit an act of literature again, so help me. And I've only had six novels published since then.

3-2

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\* A complete list of such trifles is in our pamphlet, *Constructing Sciencefiction & Fantasy*, containing tips on manuscript preparation, hints on the art of story-telling, and an annotated bibliography. Single copies \$2.00, additional copies 50¢ each; order from us at P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147.



**Publisher:** Michael Cook

**Editor:** George H. Scithers

**Managing Editor:** Patrick L. Price

**Graphic Designer:** Ruth Hoyer

**Circulation Manager:** Georgia Moore

**Advertising Sales Administrator:** Mary Parkinson

**Production:** Betty Elmore, Roger Raupp, Carolyn Vanderbilt

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# Book Reviews

## by Robert Coulson

---

Even book reviewers have problems. One of my major ones is the selection of books for review. I can stuff in at most a dozen or so books in each bimonthly column, and in two months I will receive at least fifty, and the total would be higher if all the major publishers would send me their output. The ideal method of selection, of course, would be to read every book and pick the best for the column, which is how some naïve readers may expect me to do it. Sorry, I haven't time to read that many science-fiction books, earn a living, do the necessary work around the place, and read a few other things, such as science and history. So I do the same things you do: read books by authors whose previous work I've liked, listen to friends' recommendations, and occasionally grab the book out of the pile which looks the most interesting, as well as trying to vary the column by including as many different authors and publishers as possible. This is probably one reason why a well-known author will get his or her book reviewed by everyone in the field, and the newcomer is lucky to achieve one professional review. Not only do I know whether to read or avoid the veteran, from past experience, but if I dislike the writing of a big name, I can cheerfully exonerate it, and I haven't wasted any precious reading time. Jumping on a newcomer's book is un sporting, so if it's lousy, it has to be ignored.

The newcomer shouldn't worry too much, however. Authors constantly

reiterate that reviews are unimportant, and reviewers are only failed authors, unable to envision the author's grand design. So remember, when I happen to praise your book that doesn't really mean anything. Reviewers are ignorant, and despite my praise, your book is probably rotten. Keep it in mind — especially when listening to an author who got a bad review.

### Starquake

by Robert L. Forward  
Del Rey, \$14.95 (hardcover)

A sequel to *Dragon's Egg*. Not as good as the first book, because discovering the cheela was more fascinating than reading more about them could ever be, but it's still highly entertaining. In the opening, the cheela have surpassed the human technology, and the humans are preparing to return home and put some of the advanced cheela concepts into practice. Then there is a disaster to the delicately balanced gravities holding the human ship in place, and the cheela suffer a starquake which very nearly destroys their civilization, and both sides must meet their problems. Thanks to the discovery of rejuvenation, a few cheela characters remain on stage throughout this book, but none come out quite as interesting as one or two of their people in the original volume. Highly recommended for the science and some of the characters. The scaffolding supporting the plot shows in places, if such things bother you; they didn't bother me.

### **Lifeburst**

by Jack Williamson

Del Rey, \$2.95 (paperback)

This is one that I missed in hardcover, which was one of my mistakes. It's one of Williamson's two or three best books. The plot is pretty standard, Damon Knight once described a Williamson plot as "putting his hero in approximately the position of a seventy-year-old paralytic in a plaster cast who is required to do battle with a sabertooth tiger," and keeping him there through the entire book, "only adding an extra fang from time to time." However, this makes for an exciting story, and in this one the author is juggling three factions of humanity and four major alien races, all with differing and generally mutually opposed goals. My only real cavil is that coincidence is badly overworked in the destruction of the seeker planet, and with no real point to it; the rest of the story is one of the best thrillers I've read in years.

### **Dealing in Futures**

by Joe Haldeman

Viking, \$16.95 (hardcover)

This is a collection of eleven stories and three poems, with a foreword and afterword by the author, and author's notes to each story. The original markets were widespread; some of the material will be new to almost every reader. The verse surprised me a bit by its seriousness; I'm more used to Joe's folksongs, which tend toward the ribald side. The verse is also very good. Fiction provides a wide variety, from "You Can Never Go Back," a grim account of returning soldiers which was excised from *The Forever War* and replaced by a different segment; to "More Than the Sum of His Parts," the blackly humorous side of cyborgs; to "Blood Sisters," a future

private-eye story. My own favorite is "Manifest Destiny"; even as a history fan, I never read another story in which the conclusion turns on the date of the Gadsden Purchase. All in all, it's an excellent collection.

### **Skull Gate**

by Robin W. Bailey

Tor, \$2.95 (paperback)

This is a sequel to *Frost*, which appeared in 1983 from Timescape. In this one, Frost's queen has been kidnapped by supernatural powers, and Frost sets out to get her back, aided by an elderly captain of the guards, a young assassin, and her not-exactly-tame unicorn. Her quest takes her to the Ninth Hell to strike a bargain with its overlord, and of course she's successful; if you kill off your protagonist, you can't use her for your next book. (Usually, Haldeman's notes recount once when he tried to kill off a protagonist, and failed.) It's quite well told, and entertaining to anyone who likes current swords-and-sorcery — and even to me, who doesn't. There's even a good talk in it, which I expect to hear at the next folksing.

### **Nightflyers**

by George R. R. Martin

Bluejay, \$8.95 (trade paperback)

A collection of six of George's shorter works. The title story is a short novel of passion and doom, scientific and otherwise. I never liked it much, though it's highly regarded by more poetic critics. "Override" has a simple plot, but the background of controlling corpses to mine jewels is eerie enough to make it interesting. "Weekend in a War Zone" is extrapolation from the current interest in "survival games"; let them use real guns instead of dye or BB's. Well, why not? "And Seven Times Never Kill Man" is a story of

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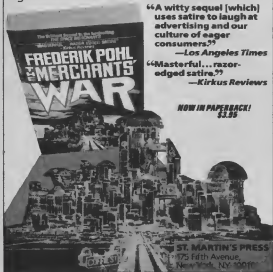
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religious fanaticism and quiet but effective alien resistance, and I disliked it for not explaining the aliens enough for me to believe in them. "Nor the Many-Colored Fires of a Star Ring" is an interesting idea, touching on a possible Creation. "A Song for Lyn" is another interesting idea; what would happen if humans found real togetherness and Godhood in the death rites of an alien race? I'm not much for togetherness anyway, but the sort of person who joins the ELKS or SFWA to be with his or her peers should find it compelling. Overall, the book shows Martin's morbid side with brilliance and a great deal of variety.

### **Killer Station**

by Martin Caidin

Baen Books, \$3.50 (paperback)

Caidin doesn't seem to get many reviews in sf magazines, and now I see why. He doesn't write very good fiction. (He writes excellent non-fiction.) This plot has been more or less done before, and better. A large space station has been sabotaged and is about to fall on New York, and the crew is trying to save it. There are very good descriptions of what building and living on a space station would be like; in fact, the first half of the book contains nothing else. The plot doesn't start to move until you're well past the midpoint, and neither plot nor characters ever become very exciting. I think I'll go read Caidin's *The Tigers Are Burning*, to reassure myself that he's a fine writer, because this book doesn't show it.

### **Act of God**

By Eric Kotani and

John Maddox Roberts

Baen Books, \$2.95 (paperback)

If this one could somehow have been combined with Caidin's novel, we'd

have had a winner. The science here is standard, and the background none too believable, but the book moves. In here, the Russians have conceived the diabolical plot of dropping pieces of comet on the U.S., and an untried U.S. spaceship has to go out and stop them. Not a book to be taken seriously, despite the blurbs, but it was more or less fun to read. Recommended, though not highly.

### **Adventures**

by Mike Resnick

Signet, \$2.95 (paperback)

This one parodies very nearly every African novel ever written. Protagonist is one Lucifer Jones: scoundrel, con man, and occasional preacher. During the course of the book he meets such characters as Bloomstoke, an English nobleman who is hiding from his creditors by living with a tribe of apes; The Dutchman, who refers to his slave trading as an international employment placement service; Herbie Miller, "ivory poacher and part-time vampire"; Capturing Clyde Calhoun, the mummy of Amen-hotep III; and assorted white gods and goddesses, society doctors, killers, con men, matineers, and opium importers. Episodic is hardly the word; it reads more like a collected series of short stories. (One which might have appeared in a sleazy rival of *Argosy*.) Good fun, especially if you've read many of the originals.

### **Discovering Modern Horror Fiction - I**

edited by Darrell Schweitzer

Starmon, \$9.95 (trade paperback)

Intended for the academic trade, but possibly of interest to anyone who enjoys book reviews; it contains essays on a number of modern horror writers. Shirley Jackson is examined by Mary

Kuttridge, Ramsey Campbell by Gary Crawford, Russell Kirk by Don Heron, Dennis Etchison by Michael Stamm, Stephen King by Ben Indick, T. E. D. Klein by Robert Price, Karl Edward Wagner by the editor, Fred Saberhagen by Neal Wilgus (with whose comments I disagree strongly), Manly Wade Wellman by your not very humble servant, John Coyne by A. J. Montesi, Roald Dahl by Alan Warren, and Jonathan Carroll by Edna Stumpf. Offhand, I think that Jackson, Kirk, Dahl and Wellman are too little appreciated in our microcosm; one or two of the others are too much so.

### **Spinneret**

by Timothy Zahn

Bluejay, \$15.95 (hardcover)

This was a four-part serial in *Analog*, in mid-1985. Earth has discovered that all the habitable planets that its spaceships can reach are claimed by other ranchers . . . er, I mean alien races. We're allowed to settle on a worthless patch of planet, and strike oil . . . that is, discover a buried alien factory which is still turning out products that the surrounding races can't match. From then on, it's up to us to outwit the aliens and the crooked land speculator (the United Nations) who all want the factory. Interestingly, Russia is barely mentioned; the villains among humans are the Third World countries. Despite obvious comparisons to other genres, I enjoyed the story; it won't win any awards, but it was fun to read. I never believed the premise for a moment, but the characters are well done and the plot sufficiently well-handled. Recommended.

### **The Harp of the Grey Rose**

by Charles de Lint

Starblaze, \$7.95 (trade paperback)

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Like so many modern fantasies, this one was inspired by Tolkien, but unlike a lot of its relatives, it has a plot and style of its own. Protagonist is a boy-approaching-manhood, who meets and loves a semi-immortal, rescues her from occult captivity, and goes on to fight assorted Dark Minions. The characters are extremely well-drawn, especially that of the super-bear, Hackschritt Trummel, and de Lint catches the appropriate poetic mood for the story. Interior art by George Barr enhances the book. It's blurbed as the first of a series.

**The Mars One Crew Manual**  
by Kerry Mark Joels

## by John Gregory Betancourt

---

May is here, and with it the illustrious sixtieth anniversary for *Amazing® Stories*. It's been a glorious six decades! And, like *Amazing®*, science fiction is also sixty years old this month.

Doubtless you've already heard how President Reagan has declared May as National Science Fiction Month. They'll be unveiling the Tomb of the Unknown Science Fiction Writer on the 1st; the 5th marks the renaming of the Lincoln Memorial (now the Hugo Gernsback Memorial); the 12th will see Robert A. Heinlein's birthday become a national holiday; and on the 23rd the Washington Monument receives its first face-lift, as it's transformed into a giant Hugo Award.

What's that? You hadn't heard? Well . . . maybe — just maybe — I *did* make it up. So what? Celebrations are a time of fun, after all.

Speaking of fun, did you know (truthfully, now) that *Amazing®* was the first SF magazine to run book reviews on a regular basis? I went back and looked through issues from the

Ballantine, \$12.95 (trade paperback)

This is a large-sized volume containing a factual account of what the first manned Mars expedition might be like. The author has worked for NASA and been a curator of the National Air and Space Museum. The book is laid out like a training manual, with appropriate photos and diagrams, plus illustrations by Mike Hinge and Paul Hudson. Text, of course, is simpler than that of a real manual would be; there are no government specs, for one thing. But it provides an idea of what a member of the crew might be expected to do, and gives the overall objectives of such a mission. For the space-minded.

early 1930s — and in the April 1932 issue I found a review of *Brave New World* that concluded:

"From the point of view of the science fiction fan, this book is a decided flop . . . but the book may serve to call the attention of a great many readers to the fact that there is a class of fiction in existence which deals with scientific subjects."

In its early years, SF only dealt with the physical sciences, leaving no room for speculation about the dynamics of society. We've come a long way since then. I hope.

Now to deal with books.

**Song of Kali**  
by Dan Simmons  
Bluejay, \$15.95 (hardcover)

The Indian poet M. Das — who disappeared and was presumed dead — has apparently resurfaced in Calcutta. Robert Luczac, a mainstream poet and novelist, is assigned to go get a story on M. Das for a magazine . . . and to bring back some new M. Das poetry.



Robert goes to Calcutta with his Indian wife, Amrita, and their baby daughter. He gets caught up in an ancient cult's power-play, as he gradually discovers that M. Das's new epic poem is designed to bring chaos to the world by literally restoring the old gods to life.

This is a savage, powerful, nightmarish horror-novel. The images of life in India are haunting, disturbing. I find that — a month after first reading — I remember the book in vivid detail, which is rare.

If you can stand an emotional roller-coaster ride, try *Song of Kali*. You won't regret it.

### **The Book of Ian Watson**

by Ian Watson

Ziesing (P. O. Box 806, Willimantic, CT 06220), \$18.50 + 1.50 p/h (hardcover)

It would be impossible to review this book story-by-story in the confines of this brief column; suffice to say, all 26 stories and essays presented here are the work of a unique voice in science fiction, and all deserve attention. I found particularly memorable "The Real Winston" — Watson's version of Philip K. Dick's version of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; and "Dance of Whispers" — a gently powerful story of disillusionment and a miracle of physics (sort of).

It's a good book, elegantly produced. Recommended.

### **Staroamer's Fate**

by Chuck Rothman

Questar, \$2.95 (paperback)

I admit it: I'm a sucker for generation-ship stories. This is one, in which a syron — sort of an intuitive human probability-machine — named Quarnian picks two humans to help her find the long-lost generation-ship

Staroamer. They set off and, sure enough, find the Staroamer just as they're running out of fuel. They dock and are made prisoners by the crew's descendants — strange people whose isolation has caused the evolution of some odd cultural and biological traits — and then they have to escape. . . .

It's literary popcorn — nothing profound, but fun. I liked it.

### **Shadows 8**

edited by Charles L. Grant

Doubleday, \$12.95 (hardcover)

Charlie Grant is, among other things, an excellent editor. His choices for the *Shadows* books are always interesting, always varied, and this eighth volume of the series is no exception. Writers are: Kim Aultieu, Jack Dann, Gene DeWeese, Nancy Etchemendy, Craig Shaw Gardner, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Nancy Jones Holder, Terry L. Parkinson, Bill Pronzini, Alan Ryan, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Al Sarantonio, Thomas Sullivan, Steve Rasnic Tem, Peter Tremayne, Sharon Webb, and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro.

The prize of the lot is Alan Ryan's "Sand," in which a woman suddenly notices that everyone bleeds red sand when they get hurt — and they think they've always bled red sand. The woman, however, cuts herself and finds real blood. And her baby, too. . . . It's a disturbing story with a twist, masterfully told. The rest of the collection ranges from fair to very good, with special kudos to Sharon Webb, Jack Dann, and Craig Shaw Gardner.

Recommended if you like horror.

### **Spells of Mortal Weaving**

by Esther Friesner

Avon, \$2.95 (paperback)

Esther Friesner is a really neat lady who writes everything from poetry to

plays, and does it with equal measures of style and success. In this novel — set in the same world as her *Mustapha and his Wise Dog* — we see more of the Twelve Kingdoms, as ancient prophecies come to pass and the evil demon Morgeld is released into the world once more. Only Prince Alban and his bride-to-be, Ursula the werebear, can defeat him.

This is a more serious, more ambitious book than Friesner's first novel, and that it succeeds better than *Mustapha* is a mark of Friesner's continuing development as a writer. Keep an eye out for it.

### **Barnaby #1 and Barnaby #2**

by Crockett Johnson

Del Rey, \$2.95 (paperback)

Some of you may remember the Barnaby comic strip from the 1940s, or the hardback reprints in the 1950s. Unfortunately, I don't — and I'm sorry I missed them!

I call to your attention these two Del Rey reprints, wherein Barnaby gets a fairy godfather (named Mr. O'Malley, whose wand is a cigar) and finds out that fairy godfathers aren't all they're cracked up to be. Mr. O'Malley has a strange ability to do things almost right — but never exactly — and the goods often get poor Barnaby in hot water.

In the first book, they meet a rather nasty Ogre and scheming Nazis; in the second, Barnaby gets a talking dog from O'Malley, investigates a haunted house, and goes to summer camp . . . with ghost and fairy godfather in tow.

Crockett Johnson was a deft satirist and, even better, produced a timeless humor which is still as funny today as it was when the strip first appeared. Though I'm not terribly fond of most comics, I do like these (they're second only to *Asterix*, in my opinion), and I

recommend them.

### **"The Cosmic Perspective"/ "Custer's Last Stand"**

by Brian Stableford

Chris Drumm (P. O. Box 445, Polk City, IA 50226), \$2.00 (regular copy) or \$5.00 (signed) + 1.00 p/h.

Chris Drumm is quietly publishing some really neat things in easily affordable form. "The Cosmic Perspective"/"Custer's Last Stand" are a couple of short stories printed back-to-back like the old Ace Doubles — about 45 pages of fiction, or 25,000 words — a third of a novel — by my count.

"The Cosmic Perspective" is a synoptic story detailing one man's apathy toward the world, and how he becomes obsessed with the stars to such an extent he devotes his life to winning their mystery — only to find yet more to disillusion him. "Custer's Last Stand" is a better — and much funnier — story about a writer whose characters come to life and picket him to get happy endings in his books. The catch is, not only Custer, but the whole world can see the ghosts. This story wouldn't have been out of place in *Amazing*®.

Recommended. Drumm has also published a lot of original material by R. A. Lafferty, among others. Ask for a catalog.

### **The Principles of Scientific Management**

by Frederick Winslow Taylor

Norton, \$5.95 (trade paper)

Warning: this book isn't fiction.

*The Principles of Scientific Management* is a good example of speculative science put to use — and proved correct. Basically, it sets forth a method of worker motivation through Management's participation in the workplace.



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I found the documented accounts of increased production fascinating — because, on the surface, the whole idea behind Taylor's scientific management seems impossible and unworkable.

True: it was written seventy years ago, and Taylor tends to regard the working class as dim-witted. However, the overall importance of the book lies in what it can accomplish when put to personal use — and I plan to use scientific management the next time I'm a supervisor at an iron smelting plant. (I may even use it in other situations.)

Seriously, I think the thought behind the theory will be of interest to all SF readers — fans are slans, after all. Pick it up next time you see it cheaply; my copy is a college text, so it's bound to be all over.

#### ODDS & ENDS:

Small-press magazines have been showing up in my mailbox of late. I

wish to bring a couple of the better ones to your attention. First is *Infinium* (5737 Louetta Rd., Spring, TX 77379), which costs \$3.00. It contains reprinted work by Darrell Schweitzer, Janet Fox, and F. M. Busby, plus new work by people I'd never heard of. What's unusual about *Infinium* is the obvious work that went into it: it's attractively laid out, with reasonably good art and passable fiction. Try it, if you've a mind to.

The second small-press magazine is *Crypt of Cthulhu* #35, a special issue in which various fans and scholars try to define the Cthulhu Mythos. It's interesting reading, and recommended. Order from Cryptic Publications, 107 East James Street, Mount Olive, NC 28365. Price is \$3.00. They've also published booklets of original material by Robert E. Howard, plus pulp-derived magazines like *Shudder Stories* and *Risque Stories*. ☞

## REPORT FROM THE SETTLEMENT

After we searched so many foreign suns,  
finding a world which welcomed us, relieved  
to find that any did, we still believed  
our tools would triumph. Shovels, chisels, guns —  
we brought them all, along with subtler things  
which have no mass. Our methods spring from mind  
and not from metal; suddenly we find,  
who always thought manipulation brings  
swift adaptation, that these relics grow  
steadily stranger. We adapt; this place  
shapes us faster than artifacts allow  
us to remake it. Life continues, though  
we wonder, who remember crossing space,  
if Terran minds would think us human now.

— Susan Palwick

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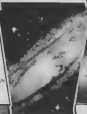


## COUNT ZERO

William Gibson

Pyrotechnics from a dazzling young superstar—a new novel set in the same future universe as his multi-award-winning *Neuromancer*.  
\$5.95

And coming in April: *Burning Chrome: The Collected Short Stories of William Gibson*



## A DOOR INTO OCEAN

Joan Stenczewski

In the powerful tradition of *Dune*, a brilliant, provocative novel of a unique planetary ecosystem, an ocean world—and the religious war fought there.  
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# Discussions

## by the Readers

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*Letters to the editor, subscription problems, and the like should be sent to our Wisconsin offices: Amazing® Stories, P. O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147. Manuscripts may be sent directly to the editors: Amazing® Stories, P. O. Box 5243, Philadelphia PA 19101. But — please! — do not use the Philadelphia address unless you have checked a reasonably current issue of the magazine to see if it is still valid.*

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I saw your picture a short time ago in *S.F. Chronicle* and had to ask myself, "Could this kindly-looking gentleman be the same one who's been rejecting my work for the last two years?"

Nah, must be a misprint.

Anyway, thanks for your consideration.

Yours,

Bernie

*Do you mean that the picture is a misprint, or that the rejections are misprints? One must really be more specific about such matters . . .*

— George H. Scithers

Dear George,

I read Robert Silverberg's column in the January, 1986 *Amazing®* with pleasure. Robert and Fred Pohl are two commentators on the science-fiction scene whom I find myself forever agreeing with — a sure

sign of their rationality and competence.

In his column, Robert speaks of an "inspired form of counterattack" against the expression "sci-fi"; that of allowing it to represent Hollywood schlock and allowing "science fiction" or "S.F." to represent the real thing.

Robert says, "I wish I knew who thought of it."

Wish no more, Robert. It was thought of by your very own friend, Isaac Asimov.

I wrote an editorial in *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine®*, in the May-June, 1978, issue, entitled, "The Name of Our Field." Here's the way that editorial ends:

"... 'Sci-fi' is now widely used by people who don't read science fiction. It is used particularly by the people who work in movies and television. This makes it, perhaps, a useful term. We can define 'sci-fi' as trashy material sometimes confused, by ignorant people, with SF. Thus *Star Trek* is SF while *Godzilla Meets Mothra* is sci-fi."

I went on to expand on the notion in later essays, but this is my first mention of it; and, as far as I know, there was no earlier mention of it by anybody.

Isaac Asimov  
New York NY

*We are sure that Forry means well originally, but unfortunately the term "sci-fi" is now used almost exclusively by people who are completely unable*

to discriminate between good SF and bad. It has become symptomatic of mass-media ignorance.

— George H. Scithers

Dear George:

Enclosed are the illos for Kevin O'Donnell's "Raccoons," Sharon Farber's "And Visions of Sugar Plums . . ." and "Money Trouble," Susan Casper's "Under Her Skin," and Susan Schwartz's "Temple to a Minor Goddess." I hope you find them acceptable.

Are you buying stories from more women than usual . . . or just sending all of their stories to me? A quick check through my records shows I've done maybe a quarter of my illos for women's stories. Not an ungodly number . . . but a rather strange number of Susan.

I was surprised and flattered to see an excerpt from one of my letters published in the latest issue. I guess I should explain why my work often looks like Fabian-on-a-bad-day: I love his sense of drama and design, and I think he's probably the all-time master at getting the most out of Coquil board. I'd like to see more of him in your pages. More Tim Kirk, too.

Best,

George Barr  
San Jose CA

We found the illos entirely acceptable; the readers will judge for themselves in the issues to come.

We're buying no larger a proportion of stories written by women than usual — but the usual proportion is pretty high and always has been. While we could easily put together a "Women Writers' Issue," we think this would serve no better purpose than, say, putting together an issue whose writers all had last names which began

with the letter N through Z.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I am an avid reader and (as yet unpublished) writer of science fiction. But I am also very interested in the editorial side of SF. Although there are many books on writing and how to get started, I have been unable to find any information on how to get started in editing. I am writing you in the hope that you can give me some information on getting started. I realize that you don't have time to fully answer my questions, but I would appreciate any and all help you can give. I have enclosed a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope for any return mail. I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Mark S. Haslam

We can recommend one text: *The Elements of Editing (A Modern Guide for Editors and Journalists)* by Arthur Plotnik, published by Macmillan.

— George H. Scithers

Nobody seems to go about getting a job as an editor in the same way — and it's doubly difficult if you are removed from New York, which is the center of the publishing industry.

Periodically, *Locus* (\$24.00 for 12 monthly issues from Locus Publications, P.O. Box 13305, Oakland CA 94661) (which you should be aware of) advertises for more assistants; that might be a place to start if you live in California. Basically, you need to get to know the local publishers and let them know you want a job. Go to SF conventions; that's a good place to meet them. Major in journalism, if you go to college. Move to New York and send résumés to publishers, or try to get

*freelance work from them. Any of these ways might work. Or they might not; it's different each time.*

*Editing is a very idiosyncratic business. Sorry we can't be of more help; you just have to know what you want to do, then go out and do it.*

— John Gregory Betancourt

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I almost wrote you after reading "The Sailor's Bride" in the November issue of *Amazing*®, but "Dragonet" in the January 1986 issue has driven me to the word processor. (What th— January 1986? Here in Massachusetts it's only October 1985. Is one of us in a time warp, or are you sending them out early to free yourselves up for the holidays?) Anyway, that Esther M. Friesner is one good word-slinger. Not that I don't enjoy the other authors you publish, but she's my favorite. Please convey this message to her from me, in re: "Dragonet" . . . Bent, Friesner, gloriously bent!

Best regards,

C. R. Morrison  
Bedford MA

*It is customary in the magazine business to date magazines one publishing period later than the issues appear on the stands (or, put another way, we put an issue on the stands one publishing period earlier than the issue date). Were we monthly, our January, 1986, issue would appear on stands at the beginning of December, 1985. Since we're bi-monthly, we show up about two months early — and we're printed even earlier than that to allow for transit time.*

— George H. Scithers

Dear *Amazing*®,

The May 1985 issue was quite amazing — so many enjoyable stories

under one cover. "A Night on the Interchange" by James Haralson was very interesting, but reminded me of the several "Heaven is Really Hell" stories I have seen in the past couple of months. But this one seems incomplete. Was Howard Lang in Heaven, Hell, or a government institution? His book of rules is concise and compact compared to a cabinet of regulations manuals we actually have in the Navy.

Most people have an instinctive understanding of what is good and desirable, and what is neither. If it were not so, no civilization would be possible — just look at the Third World. There, what is considered good and desirable is "mutable"; it changes. To a soldier, good and desirable is toting a gun and putting holes in things, living things preferably. To the clergy, good and desirable is preventing the soldier from pursuing his desires. So the soldier puts a hole in the clergy, and the problem goes away (along with another Third World country).

Scratch — Lucifer — Satan: by definition, the greatest of the bad. What is bad? Well, depends on whom I ask. Bad is acid rock (to me), or a symphony (to my next-door neighbor). Of course, the sound waves themselves are devoid of philosophical value. They may re-inforce the brain's natural rhythm and be felt as "pleasing" or they may clash and be agonizing. Separation is the only cure for this. Fortunately, Heaven is huge (billions and billions of people, to say nothing of all other life) so I envision that I can have what pleases me; and my neighbor can have what pleases him, so long as there is a light year or two intervening!

One might suppose that God and Lucifer are simply "different" in the

same sense as two kinds of music, but not so different in the good-bad department. After all, Lucifer was in Heaven at one time; James Haralson may be alluding to this when his Serlach escaped.

Michael Gordon  
Keflavik, Ireland

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I'm a new subscriber to *Amazing*®; and, judging from the past few issues, it seems awfully pro-nuclear. Though there hasn't been any mudslinging, I'm still reminded of the first (and last) issue of *Omas* I ever picked up. I never did get as far as the stories, because of an article at the beginning of the magazine. I no longer have a copy, so I can't quote it; but the author implied that anybody who is opposed to nuclear power is an

Anti-Technological Nut who is trying to stop Progress. To that case, I, avid SF reader and would-be writer, am a genuine, full-fledged Anti-Technological Nut!

It's true that the nuclear industry has had an admirable safety record so far, with the exception of one incident. It is also true that a person can smoke two or three cigarettes a day without causing serious damage to his or her health. But I have my doubts about what would happen if that person started smoking two or three packs a day.

I might be willing to keep an open mind about the safety question — after all, nobody actually died at Three Mile Island — but there's also the financial side. Nuclear power may not be as cheap as it seems, especially since plants are built with borrowed money that cannot be repaid until and unless they are finished . . . but maybe some day we'll come up with an energy source that really is safe and

economical.

Please don't take this letter as criticism. I think that everybody is entitled to his or her opinion, and I am enjoying your magazine, even when I don't agree with everything I read in it.

Sincerely,  
Mary Hodgson  
Mountain View MO

*Full-fledged, Anti-Technological outtiness depends more on why one opposes this or that, rather than on simple opposition. If you oppose anything nuclear for quasi-religious, pseudo-scientific reasons, arrived at by Revealed Wisdom rather than rational thinking (for example, "because all of us neo-conformists are opposed to reactors this season"), then you're probably a NUT; if you rationally feel that the risks of current nuclear technology are greater than their benefits, you're probably not one.*

*Nobody died at Three Mile Island, but hundreds died because of it — because of the coal-burning power plants that were used to carry the electrical load that otherwise would have been supplied by the two Three Mile Island reactors.*

*As for the financial side: all power plants — coal, nuclear, water, what have you — are built with borrowed money. Europeans — and especially the French — seem to be much better than we at building plants within budget and schedule: when they have a design that works, they build the next one exactly like it.*

— George H. Scithers

Dear *Amazing*®,

I sort of hope that *Amazing*® SF doesn't become so popular with writers that you won't have the time to write personal notes like the one I

received. Yours is the only rejection slip I've ever received that made me feel good.

My 14-year-old son, by the way, reads your magazine faithfully and had rather play *D&D*<sup>®</sup> fantasy rôle-playing games than eat. I totally approve and hope that I do write something in the future you can use. You are the top of my list from now on.

Thanks again,

Peace, love, and joy,  
Gem Bordages  
1714 Ball Ave H #1  
Galveston TX 77550

*If we do not become more popular with writers, we will be in trouble. At present, substantially more writers try writing for Amazing<sup>®</sup> Stories than we have regular subscribers. We don't hold non-subscribing against writers, but we are tempted, oh are we tempted! As far as we can tell, most manuscripts come from people who saw us listed in magazines such as Writer's Digest and The Writer, but an increasing percentage are from people who do read our magazine as well. There are practical reasons for writers to read Amazing<sup>®</sup>: see what the best*

*SF writers are writing, so that you can do something that is both different and better.*

*As for your 14-year-old: we at TSR, Inc., realize as you do that parents must monitor their children's activities. Fantasy rôle-playing games can be a valuable part of growing up — but only a part. The same goes for reading SF magazines, even our own.*

*— George H. Scithers*

*Amazing<sup>®</sup>:*

I have never bought your magazine before until now. And what do I find in the May 1985 issue? Ti Di Sky complains about a (I would guess) minor poke at the great (HA!), wonderful (double HA!) entity of California (TA DA!). I, on the other hand, come from the small, unobtrusive State of New Jersey, and I'm SICK AND TIRED OF BEING ASKED, "WHAT EXIT?"!

Ti Di Sky has problems? Quite the contrary!

Well, that's a load off my chest!  
A New Jerseyite presently staying (stuck!) in New Hampshire 'til June,  
Michael Choi  
Exeter NH

»

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## AMAZING THE 4-D FUNHOUSE

by Clayton Emery and Earl Weizenberg

by Morris Simon

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\* JAGUAR! by Morris Simon.

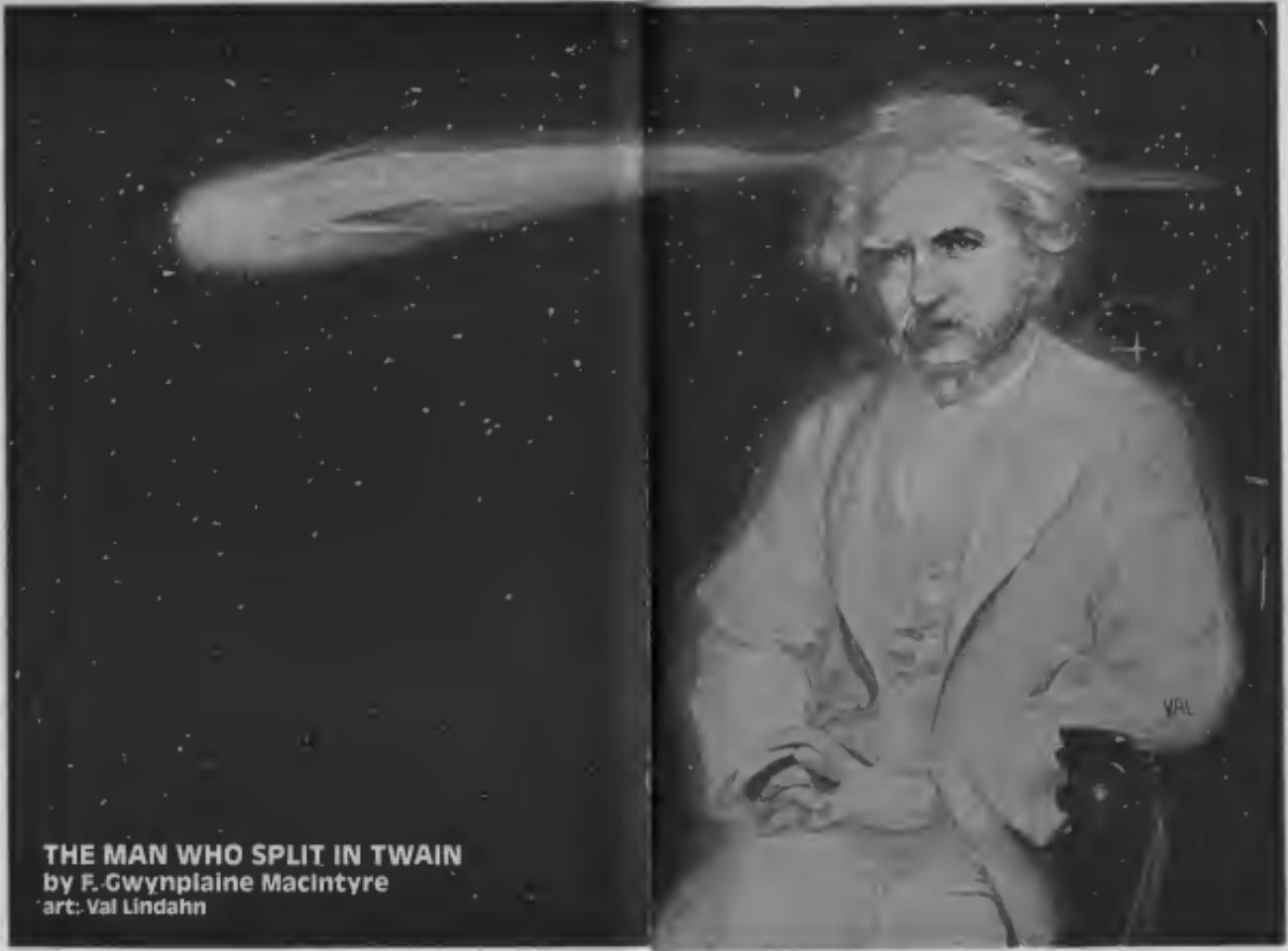
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A black and white illustration of Albert Einstein, shown from the chest up, seated and looking slightly to the right. He has his characteristic wild, white hair and a beard. He is wearing a light-colored, high-collared jacket over a dark vest and a white shirt. His hands are clasped in his lap. The background is a dark, starry space. A bright, horizontal comet streak with a long, glowing tail extends across the upper half of the image, passing behind Einstein's head. The overall style is that of a classic magazine spread.

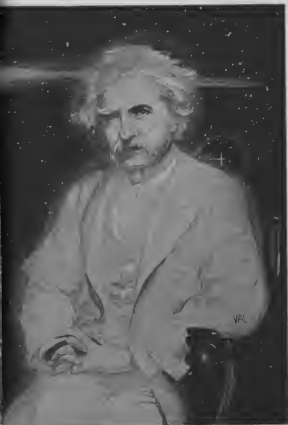
**THE MAN WHO SPLIT IN TWAIN**

by F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

art: Val Lindahn



**THE MAN WHO SPLIT IN TWAIN**  
by F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre  
art: Val Lindahn



I was advised that the house at Number 23, Tedworth Square, S.W.3, is haunted. This did not surprise me, as it is widely known that the number of ghosts desiring London accommodations far exceeds the number of houses available, and many landlords and London estate agents maintain long waiting-lists for all the ghosts, ghouls, assorted hobgoblins, and miscellaneous poltergeists who wish to abandon their crypts and castles in the provinces and seek more profitable haunting-grounds within London.

I was aware of 23, Tedworth Square's peculiar history: the three-storey building near Chelsea Embankment had once been Mark Twain's private home. When he and his family lived there — during the period from October, 1896, until Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in July of the following year — the Clemenses were the sole occupants. Nowadays the house is divided into separate flats so that several groups of total strangers, who might otherwise have been forced to reside in different buildings and never make one another's acquaintance, can now live together under one roof and despise one another.

I obtained lodgings at Number Twenty-Three, in the second-storey back, in January of 1985. The estate agent quoted a price so astronomically immense that I knew him instantly for a blood-descendant of Blackbeard the Pirate, and he committed further crimes against humanity by demanding three months' rent in advance: payable in the form of cash, cheque, or first-born child. I wrote the highwayman a cheque: he pocketed it, and gave me a look which implied he would return the next day with a crowbar for the gold in my teeth.

In the next several months I saw no evidence that the building was infested with ghosts or other psychical claptrap, except that one of my downstairs neighbours — Mrs Buggins, in the ground floor front — bore a definite resemblance to a banshee. The only other apparitions worth mentioning were three punk-rock musicians with polka-dot mohawks, who called themselves Snoggo and the Wankers, and who rented rooms directly beneath mine shortly after I moved in. At first I was afraid that their guitar-practice would keep me awake all night; fortunately, it appears that punk-rock musicians never practise.

I confess a certain pleasure was derived from living in the same rooms once occupied by Mark Twain, and my interest in the man and his work — rather keen to begin with — grew steadily stronger. Gradually one corner of my den was given over to Mark Twain artifacts: I obtained several volumes of his novels, and a bound collection of his magazine stories and essays. After long negotiation with several antique-dealers and other extortionists I became the proud owner of three antique photographs of Mark Twain (one of them autographed); a green armchair that had once belonged to Mark Twain, from his country home in Guildford, Surrey; an Edison's Magniscope film of *Mark Twain at Stormfield*; an empty balsa-wood box, the label of which assured me that it had once contained Mark Twain Brand Nickel

Cigars ("Known to Everyone, Liked by All, Genuine Sumatra Wrapper"); a Mark Twain cigarette-card from a packet of Mogul Cigarette Papers ("Let All Your Troubles End in Smoke!"); and a 1906 four-colour broadsheet advertisement recovered from the wall of an ancient Connecticut barn, sporting Mark Twain's scowling visage and advising me that Mr Twain endorsed the firm of Hilliar & Mallory ("Plumbers, Steamfitters and Gas, Dealers in Stoves, Ranges, Furnaces, and Lead Pipe to the Trade"). These items were all lovingly displayed in a corner of my den, to the vast amusement of my house-guests and the vaster depletion of my bank balance. The empty Mark Twain cigar-box I replenished with a fiver's worth of stogies from the tobacconist's shop in King's Road, and I evicted a colony of black-beetles from the upholstery of the armchair. I read the Mark Twain books upon occasion, and went on with what passes for my life.

In November of 1985, as surely the entire world must know by now, Halley's Comet returned. At November's beginning a flicker-dim point of light appeared in the evening sky, midway between Aldebaran and the Pleiades. It drew gradually closer to the Earth, elbowing its way past intervening constellations in its haste to keep its appointment with the Sun. Each successive night, the flickering grew brighter as the wanderer returned from outer space.

On Earth, a wide range of reactions were aroused by the comet's approach. The astronomers, for the most part — those dedicated tireless individuals who maintain a constant vigil of the stars, in search of new and different reasons to obtain research grants — the astronomers got off their azimuths, squinted into their telescope eye-pieces, saw Halley's approach, and harrumphed: "What, a rerun? Seen it before. Already know how it ends. Right, what else is on?" They changed channels and left Halley's alone. But the comet kept hurtling Earthwards. Seventy-three new religions sprang into existence in California, India, and East Grinstead, each of them prophesying the end of the world, and all of them soliciting funds so as not to be caught without bus-fare to Heaven on Judgment Day. None of this occupied a great deal of my thoughts, as I was single-mindedly slaving away at my life's work of grinding out manuscripts for magazine articles, short stories, and novels . . . all of which I write in order to help editors find a home for their vastly swollen stockpiles of rejection slips. By the end of January I had papered the walls of two rooms and the foyer with rejection slips, and was preparing for a similar assault on the den.

On the night of February the eighth, 1986, Halley's Comet attained its closest position to the Sun. I was not home that evening, having made one of my frequent nocturnal forays to the local pub, the Wicker Man, in order to conduct further research on the effect of alcohol upon the human nervous system. Towards midnight, however, I was on my way home, and as I passed Albert Bridge I received an excellent view of the approaching comet, a few degrees to the east of Capricorn. *What an incredible sight*, I realised. To

think that all Mankind everywhere are pausing right now, in the midst of their warfare and madness and hate, to look up at the sky for one night filled with wonder and awe, to see the comet return, and all Humanity bears witness to the incredible marvels of our boundless and unlimited universe. There must be some way I can make a buck out of this. Maybe if I sell advertising space on the comet? . . . No, too complicated. Comet insurance? Perhaps. Maybe a book dealing with . . .

I was still wading knee-deep in thoughts, then, when I reached Tedworth Square, climbed the stairs to my second-floor flat, and went in. My conscious mind had gone off on hank-holiday elsewhere as my subconscious mind flung its coat in the general direction of the floor, inspected the latest batch of incoming rejection slips ("Dear Sir: We cannot use the stack of paper you sent us; somebody typed on it"), went into the den, fixed itself a drink, switched on the late-late movie on Anglia TV (*Carry on Caligula*, starring Boh Monkhouse and Cicely Courtneidge), and deposited itself in a chair. Then and only then, as I succumbed to the pleasant effects of gin and bitters ravaging my bloodstream and the distant sound of my liver whimpering for mercy, I suddenly became aware of cigar smoke.

I turned. Sitting there in his own armchair, filching yet another stogie from my cigar-box while the butt-ends of two others smouldered nearby, and helping himself to my personal whisky, sat Mister Mark Twain.

Not the ghost of Mark Twain, I was certain, nor an actor in crepe whiskers and collodion-putty. An actor would have passed up my cigars in favour of a raid on the refrigerator, and ghosts are not commonly known to fancy Scotch whisky. (The form of spirits preferred in the spirit-world, I am told, is Boo-jolais.) No, the man in the armchair was the genuine article, right enough: Mark Twain himself.

"Delighted to meet you," I said to my guest, switching off the television just as Boh Monkhouse was disguising himself as Cicely Courtneidge. "Although seeing you, Mister Twain, comes as rather a surprise. I had thought you were dead."

"I believe," said Mark Twain, as he took another puff on the cigar, "that the precise wording of my statement to the London correspondent of the *New York Journal* went as follows: 'The report of my death was an exaggeration.' Yes, I died, and was offered lodge membership in Heaven if I would give up cigars and swearing. That was intolerable to me, so I took my business to their competitors — in the Other Place — but was told by the Purgatory boys that I could only be let in on a trial basis, as they had their reputation to think of. Well, sir, Hell was pleasant enough — I was reunited with many of my old friends down there — until I organized a labor strike among Brother Lucifer's furnace-stokers — Brimstone Local 482 — and that got me into trouble. Murderers and horse thieves are welcome in Hell, but union organizers are not to be tolerated. So here I am."

"I'm surprised," I admitted, "to see you here, though, in London. Surely

you would be more at home in Missouri, or at your home in Connecticut . . ."

"Both places be thundered," snorted Mark Twain. He produced a calabash pipe from the pocket of his suit and began vivisectioning my cigars, tamping their tobacco into the bowl of his pipe. "This house in Tedworth Square was always my favorite home: too many corpses and assorted unpleasantries in all the other places. And I have long been fond of England: I've always said it's a pity to waste England on the English. But I couldn't face going back to my old home in Surrey: I was there, in Guildford, when my darling Susy died. Fact, London is the only place I ever lived where no memories haunt me, and now I come back to my old home and find you've got my room all laid out with my chair and my books and cigars, so how could I refuse the invitation? Well, Jesus H. Christ, man! I appreciate a considerate host, sir, as they are generally the kind most easily taken advantage of."

"I find your timing is remarkable," I said to Mark Twain. "You've come back only just in time to see Halley's Comet."

"Why should *that* matter?" said the novelist abruptly, which I thought very strange. For it is well known that, on the night Mark Twain was born, in 1835, Halley's Comet was in the sky above Earth, and he often predicted that he would die when the comet returned, in 1910, which in fact was what *actually happened*. Why did he show no great concern, therefore, towards Halley's Comet now?

"I have nothing against Halley's Comet," said Twain, lighting his calabash southpaw-fashion. "It occurs to me that any ball of ice which passes Earth, takes one look at the human race, and has the sense to stay away for another seventy-six years, is extremely commendable."

"The comet is only partially visible from my window," I said. "The dome of Chelsea Hospital, just south of here, is in the way. However, if you'd care to accompany me into the street . . ."

"I have no particular desire to see the comet," said Samuel Langhorne Clemens. "I intend to sit here and smoke all your cigars, and drink all of your whiskey, and in general ignore all my doctor's instructions; and as soon as you run out of tobacco and liquor — then at that point, sir, your company will become intolerable to me."

I had the impression that Mark Twain had said something extremely wrong, but I could not think precisely what it was. The thought struck me that Twain's behaviour was unaccountably rude, but I reminded myself that I was in the presence of a man who had insulted some of the greatest minds of the past two centuries, so I accepted the honour. "I daresay it is a privilege of sorts," I told Mark Twain, "to be insulted by you. I know that you insulted Lewis Carroll and Winston Churchill when you met them, and when you were introduced to Rudyard Kipling — thereby disproving his motto 'Never the Twain shall meet' — you also insulted him. Perhaps I should be honoured to have something in common with such eminent targets."

Mark Twain stiffened as I spoke, and I thought that he betrayed some unease. "You seem to know a good deal about me, Mister . . . ?"

"MacIntyre is the name I'm currently using," I said. "At least, until my creditors catch up with it; then I shall have to use another. At present I am named F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre."

"You choose a curious name to inhabit," Mark Twain puffed again at his pipe. "I wrote an essay on one of its previous occupants, back in 1869."

"I have read it."

"Have you?" Mark Twain suddenly bounded out of his chair and loped over to the bookcase, stooping slightly to examine the titles on my shelf. "You appear to have quite a number of my books here."

"I have read," I informed him, "not counting the manuscript fragments which do not survive, everything you ever wrote."

"That's impossible, sir."

"Not at all," I told Samuel Clemens. "I've read the newspaper dispatches you wrote under other names, before you took the pseudonym Mark Twain. Your first pen-name, I think, was . . ." I had to look up the precise spelling as I spoke, ". . . W. Epaminondas Adrastus Blah. For some reason, that pen-name never caught on with the public. Next, you became Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass, and . . ."

Now this is really quite odd. As I said the name "Thomas," Mark Twain turned quite suddenly pale. If it is possible for a man who has been dead for three-quarters of a century to shudder, Mark Twain shuddered. But he regained his composure quickly enough, and interrupted me.

"I was never fond of that name," said Samuel Clemens. "I wrote as Thom . . . as Jefferson Snodgrass once, but gave it up. My next pen-name was Quintus Curtius Snodgrass. And after that, sir, I called myself Mark Twain, after my Mississippi river-pilot days. 'Mark Twain,' of course, was the leadsmen's call when the riverboat struck two fathoms' depth."

"There were two Mark Twains, were there not?" I asked.

Clemens stiffened again, but this time I was not surprised. Like many Mark Twainophiles (Twainophiliacs? Twainomaniacs? Never mind.), I knew that there was another Mississippi river pilot who had called himself Mark Twain. He was Captain Isaiah B. Sellers, and in the 1850s he wrote for the New Orleans *Picayune* under the by-line "Mark Twain." Samuel Clemens was aware of this, having served under Captain Sellers aboard — I looked it up — the riverboat *William H. Morrison* on its St. Louis-New Orleans run, in July of 1858. Isaiah Sellers had been Mark Twain ten years before Sam Clemens ever got his hands on the monicker; and it was widely known, when Clemens first began to find success as "Mark Twain" a few years later, that he had stolen another man's pen-name. Samuel Clemens was uncomfortable about this for the rest of his life. I saw that I had made an indiscretion in confronting the dead man with the fact of his name-theft, so I hastened to placate him. "Even though you were not the *first* Mark Twain,"

I said quickly, reaching for the whisky bottle and refilling Clemens's glass, "you were definitely the more talented of the two. No one remembers Isaiah Sellers these days."

I was surprised when, as I said this, Clemens relaxed completely. I thought that there was even some semblance of a smile beneath his white moustache. "I misunderstood," he nodded, accepting the drink. "When you spoke of two Twains you meant myself and Sellers."

"Of course. Who else could I have meant?"

"You mentioned the comet . . ." said Mark Twain, bringing this thought out of nowhere, and I am not so unobservant that I fail to notice when a subject is pulled out from under me. Samuel Clemens had preferred not to speak of Halley's Comet before, and yet now when I mentioned the subject of duplicate Twains he seized the comet eagerly enough, as the more desirable topic of discussion. Something was decidedly wrong here, for no novelist ever born — not Mark Twain, nor any other — ever wants to shift the subject of conversation *away from himself*. Novelists, every single last one of them, are a thoroughly conceited and egotistical lot . . . with the sterling exception, of course, of myself. (I am not the least bit conceited, although I have every right to be.) As I thought of this, I went over to the mirror, to admire my . . .

"*EEEE!*"

"Something wrong?" Mark Twain asked me, hoisting his drink.

"Glub," I replied, goggling at the mirror. "Jumping Kallikaks!"

"Speak up, boy!" said Mark Twain. "Don't talk nonsense. That job's reserved for editors and Congressmen."

I was staring at the mirror, the reflection in the glass. My face was there, devilishly handsome as always. And behind me I saw the reflection of the other in the room. *But it wasn't Mark Twain.*

In the surface of the glass I saw the mirror-image chair, and in the mirror-chair sat Mark Twain's mirror-self. But the thing in the looking-glass chair was inhuman. I saw the reflection of a hideous dwarf, a hunchbacked thing shaped like a caricature of Mark Twain . . . for Twain's features, mashed and perverted, could still be picked out in the newcomer's face. It was a wizened homunculus, barely two feet tall, its flesh encrusted with some sort of green fungoid growth, and it was sitting in Mark Twain's armchair, calmly drinking my whisky and smoking a cigar . . . — as real as life, and quite as unnatural.

I turned away from the mirror, and looked back at the chair. It was full of Mark Twain again, or something shaped exactly like him. The cigar-smoking dwarf had vanished, and the genuine pipe-smoking Mark Twain was there, ignoring me and devoting his full attention to my whisky.

I looked back at the mirror, and saw the ghastly reflection again, where Mark Twain should have been. The shape in the mirror was a dwarf with a cigar.

The most frightening thing about the image in the looking-glass was that it looked extremely *familiar*. I felt certain that I had encountered this creature somewhere before; but how could I have seen such a hideous thing, and not remember it? There had to be some other . . .

Then I knew where it had come from.

My coat was on the floor where I had hung it. I picked it up now, and tried to appear casual. "I'm going out for a bit," I told the thing in the arm-chair. "Halley's Comet won't come back again until . . . *hum*, let's see; carry the seven . . . until 2061, give or take the odd fortnight. I ought to see it tonight, while I'm still healthy enough. In 2061 I may not be feeling so chipper."

"*Please yourself*," said the thing that pretended to be Mark Twain, without looking up. It had finished most of the Scotch, and was turning its attention to my gin.

I edged myself towards the bookshelf, put my coat on with a casual flourish that was meant to look debonair, and suavely knocked several books to the floor. "Sorry," I stammered, hastily picking up the books. *Is this the proper one? Right; got it.* I hid the book in my coat, and returned the other volumes to the shelf. "I am just going outside and may be gone for some time," I said, scurrying towards the door.

"No hurry," grunted the counterfeit Mark Twain. As I left, the creature struck another match and began reading my mail. . . .

I got the Hell out of there. "Evening, squire," said a trio of figures sporting polka-dot mohawks and cummerbunds, as they passed me on the stairs. They were carrying two violins and a 'cello: Snoggo and the Wankers had been unable to obtain any punk-rock concert bookings of late, and the Labour Exchange had forced them to accept temporary employment — at far lower wages and fewer job benefits — as musicians with the London Symphony Orchestra. I tripped over Snoggo's 'cello-case, ricocheted off the stair-posts, and then I was downstairs and into the street.

Halley's Comet was still overhead, towards the southern horizon. By its light, and by the spasmodic flicker of a malfunctioning street-lamp that had not been repaired since 1917 (thank you, Greater London Council!), I took out the book I had concealed in my coat; and I started to read. . . .

It was a collection of Mark Twain's magazine articles and short stories; I flipped about until I found what I was looking for: a science-fiction story entitled "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut." This peculiar tale of Mark Twain's had originally appeared in the June 1876 number of the *Atlantic* magazine; I have read it often, always annoyed that the modern-day editors of *Atlantic* do not buy science-fiction stories as readily as their more enlightened nineteenth-century counterparts did. But now, when I thought of the thing that waited in my room in Tedworth Square, it occurred to me that "Carnival of Crime" might not be science fiction after all. . . .

I started reading Mark Twain's SF yarn again. It was written in the first person, and from various clues within the text it was evident that the narrator of the tale was Samuel Langhorne Clemens himself.

Only a supreme egomaniac, I thought while I turned the pages, would write a story with himself as the narrator.

I kept reading. In the story, Samuel Clemens was alone in his room, when suddenly

*... the door opened, and a shriveled, shabby dwarf entered. He was not more than two feet high. Every feature and inch of him was a trifle out of shape, a deformity. There was a cunning in the face and the sharp little eyes, an alertness and malice. And yet, this vile bit of human rubbish seemed to bear a resemblance to me! He was a far-fetched suggestion of a burlesque upon me, a caricature of me in miniature. He was covered all over with a fuzzy greenish mould, and the sight of it was nauseating . . .*

I read more rapidly, skipped the story's embellishments, and reread crucial passages.

The dwarf in the story sat down in the narrator's chair and proceeded to accuse its host (Samuel Clemens himself) of a series of sins and indiscretions. Some of the crimes of which Clemens is accused by the dwarf are not immoral acts, but merely improper thoughts. Every single accusation is true, but Clemens cannot imagine how the intruder could have witnessed his privatest acts and audited his very thoughts. Then Clemens confronts his accuser:

*"I think you are Satan himself," I replied.*

*"I am not," said the devilish pygmy.*

*"Then who can you be?"*

*"I am your Conscience!"*

And then, by God, I saw the answer. And I knew what sort of creature had invaded my rooms.

Halley's Comet was streaking towards Battersea Rise as I ran back upstairs to my flat and confronted the thing in the armchair.

"I know who you are," I said, approaching my visitor.

"Of course you do," remarked the thing that had copied Mark Twain's shape. "Hail Columbia, man! I'm Sam Clemens."

"That's a lie," I said, taking out a pen and some paper. "There are three elements in Mark Twain's work that have always mystified me. The first is his fixation with twins. I can think of at least a dozen sets of twins in the stories of Mark Twain. There are John Canty's twin daughters in *The Prince and the Pauper*, the Lathers twins in Twain's novella *The American Claim-*

ant, the Italian twins in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the two sets of twins in *The Gilded Age*, the twins in *Was it Heaven? or Hell?*, the twins in . . ."

"That's enough twins for the moment," said the ersatz Mark Twain. "I'm beginning to see double."

"The second curious element in Mark Twain's work," I went on, "is his fixation with dual personalities, of Good and Evil as counter-versions of the same man." I took a volume from the shelf: it was Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. "This book," I remarked to my visitor, "affected Samuel Clemens more profoundly than any other work he had ever read. Purely on the basis of *Jekyll and Hyde*, Clemens sought an introduction to Robert Louis Stevenson. They are known to have spent several hours together in New York City, discussing dual personalities. And it is a matter of historical record that on his death-bed, Mark Twain raved about *Jekyll and Hyde*, and insisted that both of their personalities were present in himself."

In the stillness of the room, my caller shifted in his chair. "Pray go on," said the simulation of Clemens. "This has become most interesting."

Did his features change slightly, as he spoke? In the dim light, it was difficult to tell.

"The word 'twain,' of course, means *double*," I said, speaking quickly, before I might run out of nerve. "This leads to the *third* theme within Mark Twain's work: the *Doppelgänger*. Several of Twain's novels contain two men, or two boys, who are not brothers but who are of identical appearance. In each case, invariably, one of the two steals the other's identity, thereby forcing the second to take the identity of the first, or to assume an alias. Shall I set down for you a list of the *Doppelgängers* populating the works of Mark Twain?"

I drew up a list, and gave this to the stranger. "See if you discover the common element," I challenged him.

This was the list:

In each of these works by Mark Twain...	...the character who is named...	...exchanges identities with his <i>Doppelgänger</i> , who is named:
<i>The Prince and the Pauper</i>	H.R.H. Edward Todor	THOMAS Catty
<i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i>	Huckleberry Finn	THOMAS ("Tom") Sawyer
<i>Pudd'nhead Wilson</i>	Valer de Chambers	THOMAS à Becket Driacoll
<i>Which Was the Dream?</i>	Jeff Sedgewick	THOMAS X

"You will note," I observed to the visitor, "that there is, as Mark Twain might have put it, a definite surplussage of Thomases. For some reason,

Mark Twain created a whole procession of characters whose greatest pleasure is to switch lives with their own physical doubles, all of whom were conveniently named Thomas."

The thing in the armchair regarded me solemnly. Without moving, it shifted. It began to look less like Mark Twain, and more like . . . another. "Remarkable," said the stranger. "I do believe that you have figured out the secret."

"I had one other clue," I told my visitor, "and it came from the Bible. Mark Twain was an atheist; he chose to disbelieve the Scriptures, but he read them frequently and was obsessed with them. I have upon occasion read the Bible myself — I expect to find a loophole in it one of these days — and I know that it says, in the Gospel of Saint John, where Mark Twain has surely seen it, that *the name 'Thomas' means 'twin'.*"

"I congratulate you," said the changing visitor. "You are not as stupid as you look."

"You are not any fragment of Clemens," I said to the stranger. "I know you, and your name means 'double twin.' You are Thomas Twain, the *Doppelgänger* of Samuel Clemens, the counter-version of himself that pursued Mark Twain all his life, that populated his nightmares, that hounded him to his deathbed."

The thing in the armchair, having no farther use for its face, removed it. Then it took off its arms and legs and pocketed them carefully, forming cavities within itself to engulf them. "Much better," it sighed, assuming quite another shape entirely. The creature seemed, at this point, to be composed less of physical matter than of fluctuating light — dimming and brightening just the same way as other beings might breathe in and out. It left the armchair and hovered near my bookshelf. "Now then," the pulsating brightness went on, "*since you know this much, you very likely can guess all the rest.*"

"You gave yourself away," I told the visitor. "You said something which struck me as wrong, but I couldn't quite place what it was at the time. Now I remember: Mark Twain was fascinated by Halley's Comet, and by comets in general, but during his lifetime no one knew much about comets' physical nature. Yet earlier on this evening you referred to Halley's Comet, quite accurately, as a ball of ice."

For a time neither one of us spoke. I heard the ticking of my clock in a corner of the room . . . and through the window, far away across the midnight London, to the east, in the Pimlico streets behind Victoria Station, I could hear the faint distant sounds of Borstal youth gangs gently breaking one another's skulls. At last, having finished its silence, my visitor spoke:

"I arrived on the comet," the flicker-thing said. "My people are the wanderers, who belong to no star-system, yet pass amongst them all . . ."

"The comets. Of course." I nodded, and reached for my pipe. "D'you mean to say you use comets for spaceships?"

"No. Our vessels the comets are more like . . ." (it seemed to grope about

for the proper word) "... the comets are like Phoenix eggs. They nurture us, birth us. We awaken when our vessels carry us close to some star, and the warmth rouses us. Afterwards, when the star is behind us, we sleep . . . until rebirth and reawakening, at the next destination."

I had recently read several papers in scientific journals, presenting evidence that comets may contain organic matter. I had never suspected, when I read of it, that the organic matter in question might one evening enter my flat and prop its feet on my furniture, and help itself to my whisky and cigars. To the comet-visitor I said: "Explain, if you please, your relationship to Mark Twain."

"I passed this planet," said the wanderer, "in 1835, by your calendar's reckoning, though I knew nothing of clocks nor calendars at the time. I decided that it would be fun to leave Star-Mother temporarily, and . . ."

"Star-Mother being Halley's Comet?"

"Yes. I knew that there would be plenty of time, for Star-Mother would remain within reach of your world for several days. And so I left Star-Mother's vessel, and journeyed towards Earth . . ."

I was about to interrupt again, and ask this creature how it had made its passage from Halley's Comet planetwards. Then I remembered having read that some organic compounds — amino acids, protein chains, and the like — often travel through space, aboard the solar wind. I said nothing, and my visitor continued:

"I reached Earth, although at the time I did not know this planet's name. And I was surprised to discover . . ." (again, the visitor paused, as if searching for a word) "... to find presences, similar to myself, but trapped within curious vessels . . ."

"Entities, do you mean? Intelligences?" I asked. "Human minds in living bodies?"

"Precisely! I came among them, I listened to one presence here, touched another thought somewhere else. I passed among the corridors of minds until . . . now this is the peculiar part . . . I sensed a presence that was forming thoughts about me!"

"Was this, by chance," I asked the star-guest, "in Missouri?"

"So you name the region, yes. I found myself drawn towards one particular beacon of consciousness, and as I drew closer I discovered that it was actually two entities — one fully sentient, the other aware and yet somehow also dormant — and both presences dwelt in one vessel. For some reason the primary entity seemed to regard the dormant second mind within itself as interchangeable with my vessel the comet."

"I can explain that," I offered. "Mark Twain's mother believed in astrology, and drew connections between her children and their birth-stars. She named her eldest son Orion Clemens, simply because Orion was the brightest constellation in the sky on the night of his birth."

I went to the bookcase, consulted a volume, and searched until I found the

proper passage. "Yes, here it is! Halley's Comet attained perihelion on 16 November, 1835; Samuel Clemens was born a few days later. It says here — I'll paraphrase it — that Jane Lampton Clemens, happening to look up shortly before her son Samuel's birth, saw Halley's Comet pass overhead, and at the same time she felt her . . . um, she sensed her young straggler passenger stirring within her. Obviously, having named one son for a constellation, she would not hesitate — given the circumstances — to draw connections between another son and Halley's Comet. What happened next?"

"I drew closer to this entity," said my visitor, "drawn towards it partly by my will, and partly borne on the current of thoughts. For thoughts travel in currents, you see; some attracting other minds, and some repelling them. The thought-self before me was beckoning, and I felt it welcome me, saying: 'You and the comet, together, have come.'"

"Understandable," I nodded. "Jane Clemens, feeling the movements of her unborn son Samuel, must have been directing her thoughts towards him. Or did you sense that she was addressing you?" I asked my guest.

"Myself, yes, and the dormant other," said the wanderer. "I began to grow frightened. I tried to leave. But by now the current of thought-stream drawing me towards this presence was so strong that I could no longer fight against it. I was trying to find my vessel, the comet Star-Mother, but the creature in my presence kept insisting that it held the comet, something very like the comet, here within its own body. It was all so confusing . . ."

"No doubt, since Jane Clemens felt her son personified the comet. Then what?"

"And then the second mind-presence, the dormant one, became suddenly awake all at once. It reached out for every possible sensation, clutching hold of every stimulus its mind could touch . . ."

"An unusual, but accurate description," I said, "of the birth trauma."

"I was consumed, drawn into the awakening entity, and I was too exhausted and confused to be able to leave. I felt myself drawn in two different directions: by the mind that had engulfed me, and by Star-Mother, my comet. But all this time the mind that held me grew much stronger, while my comet Star-Mother, far off now, grew ever more distant away . . ."

" . . . and your star-vessel did not return," I said, lighting my pipe, "until 1910, at the time of Mark Twain's death." I consulted the book again. "Halley's Comet appeared that year in the constellation Orion; it attained zenith on 19 April, and Mark Twain died at sunset two days later. Is that when you returned to the stars?"

"It was," said my guest, "having been trapped, for seventy-five years' interim, in the body and mind of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. Only his death could release me."

I felt the need for a drink. "I only hope," I remarked to my visitor, "that the von Däniken Brigade never hears about this. They'll claim that Twain's

novels were written by extraterrestrials. . . ."

"I never wrote a word of Mark Twain's work," said the star-born. "His genius was his own. But I brought him his madness."

"Please explain."

"Separated from Star-Mother, I could not survive without a vessel to inhabit. I was forced to adapt Samuel Clemens's mind so that it could sustain me. Gradually, as Clemens grew older, he became more aware of my presence within him; and he welcomed this. He named me Thomas, or Tom, for the Biblical twin; and he offered me haven within his mind."

"Two questions, though," I asked the visitor. "Firstly: why did you come back to Earth, after so many years? And secondly: why, when I first met you, did you pretend to be Mark Twain?"

"I can tell you that," said a voice in the corner. I looked, and there in his armchair sat Mark Twain himself. The mane of hair, the moustache-whiskers, were unmistakable. The Great Curmudgeon had returned.

"There you are, Tom, you body-thieving bucketsnipe," said Mark Twain to the pinpoint of light. "Come on out here where a man can get a look of you."

"I am here," said the comet-born wanderer. The pinpoint of light changed again, shifted into a material form. And now it was the misshapen dwarf that I had seen in the mirror, the moss-covered caricature of Samuel Clemens, from his story "The Carnival of Crime": the form in which Mark Twain perceived his inner self.

"There are all kinds of prisons," said Mark Twain to his dark twin. "So you were trapped in my mind, Tom? I was trapped in the worst prison ever devised. Shall I tell you about it?"

"I believe," I said quickly, "that this is hardly the time . . ."

"Keep quiet, you!" Mark Twain glared at me, while filching one of my ashtrays. His eyes, I observed, were of an unusual colour: green and grey in equal quantities: "I didn't come here to help you make a fool of yourself," Mark Twain told me. "I believe that you can manage that without my assistance. I've been listening to your blatherments; you know a bit about Mark Twain, but you don't know two cents' worth of Samuel Clemens. Sit down and listen, and maybe you'll learn something. And pass me those cigars."

I passed him the cigar-box and sat down.

Mark Twain be-stogied himself, then reached into his pocket and extracted a flaming lump of coal. He lit the cigar with this, and took a tentative puff.

"Not the Dunhill Havanas I always favored," he declared. "But a decent cheroot nonetheless. Better, at any rate, than the Missouri Toby-weeds my father always smoked. Now, then: I've come a long way to be here tonight." He indicated the burning-hot coal in his hand. "At my current address they pave the street with these things, and call 'em Purgatory bed-warmers." He flung the coal into my fireplace and puffed the cigar.

"I was remarking on my imprisonment," said Mark Twain to myself and the star-twin. "I was condemned, without jury or trial, to serve a sentence of seventy-five years in the body and life of Samuel Clemens. My earliest memory is this: when I was three years old, back in Missouri, my mother showed me the corpse of my older sister Margaret, in her coffin. So my life, for all practical purposes, begins at Margaret's death. When I was six, in Hannibal, my brother Benjamin had the impertinence to die, and my mother forced me to touch the dead boy's face. At age seven I walked into my father's room late one night and found a dead man looking at me; some fool had imprudently gotten himself stabbed. Since my father was the local judge, and authorized to investigate murders, I suppose the corpse had come to see him on official business, rather than a social call. We often had cadavers stopping by to visit us of an evening, round about the dinner-hour. When I was eight, I saw a man get murdered right in front of me, and I watched the coroner dismantle him on my father's table. All callers at Chateau Clemens could be sure of finding a good meal put together on the stove, and a ripe corpse taken apart on the table. And one night when I was eleven, by God, the dead man on the table was *my father*, and I watched the coroners dissect him and haul the parts away for scrap. When I was seventeen, I slaughtered a man through my own bull-headed stupidity; gave some lucifer-matches to a half-crazy drunkard, and he used them to turn himself into an alcohol-lamp: he burned to death. Well, Missouri was knee-deep in corpses by then, so I lit out for the territory. Became a riverboat steersman, then a full pilot. My younger brother Henry — my dearest brother, my favorite — came along with me at my insistence. Well, the Mississippi River came to kill him one night; but before it could take Henry, I murdered him."

"Henry Clemens was not murdered," said Thomas Twain, the hunch-backed dwarf. "He received a fatal injection of morphine, and . . ."

"Yes, God damn you," said Mark Twain. "And *I gave it to him*. So the river and I were quits from then on. I got married, settled down in New York, began a family, and proceeded to murder my son."

"I would hardly call that murder," said the moss-covered alternate Twain. "Langdon Clemens succumbed to diphtheria."

"Yes, he did," said Mark Twain. "And if you know that, then you know that *his death was the result of my deliberate actions*."

I waited for Twain's *Doppelgänger* to deny this . . . but the creature said nothing.

"Shall I count for you all the corpses on parade?" Mark Twain asked. "The procession of frauds? My business failings? My loss of millions, my plunge into bankruptcy through bad speculations, is well-known. *It is my own fault*. My favorite daughter Susy died in New York while I was hiding from my debts here in England. *My fault*. My wife, my darling Livy, died when we were living in Europe. *My fault*. And my daughter Jean drowned one Christmas Eve, in my bathtub at Stormfield, and one Hell of a Christ-

mas present that was. *All my fault.*"

"*There is no need to relive these passages,*" said the dwarf-thing Thomas Twain, very gently. "*I have already seen them, mind-brother. I have shared your sadness, witnessed your sorrows, every moment from birth to your death. I have touched your whole life. . . .*"

"*My life, you thieving jackass!*" Sam Clemens jumped up, gripped Thomas Twain by the throat, and made a creditable attempt to strangle him. I gave a shout and ran towards them, and promptly collided nose-first with some sort of invisible wall. I could not find an opening in it: the invisible barrier surrounded the two halves of the Twain, an impenetrable shell engulfing both, and keeping me out.

"*My life, you damned jimjam buffoon!*" Mark Twain howled, as he clutched his *Doppelgänger*. "*Why you thimble-riggin', pearl-buttoned, copper-bottomed, barrel-bellied, never-knew-the-territory rube! You were dead cargo, Tom. You stowed aboard Samuel Clemens and hid, shared my life without sharing the risks, spied on all my private secrets, watched my shames, saw my mistakes, and let me do all the galley-work. I piloted Sam Clemens all his bilgewater life, and I struck every rock, scraped every shallow, lost the compass overboard, hurt every person I cared about, and in general made every possible mistake . . . yes, and carried your stowaway carcass besides! You had the best end of the partnership, Tom: when I did anything right, you benefited from my success, but whenever I did something wrong I got stuck with all the blame and the responsibility. You never had to choose between the difficult virtue and the comfortable sin, Tom; you never had to fight, or bleed, or work at something for back-breaking years and watch it explode in your face. Hell, the only face you ever wore is mine! I never wanted to be Samuel Langborne Claimants; it's a losing proposition. But who else could I be? Mark Twain? I never owned that name; I stole it from a decent, honest man: Isaiah Sellers. No matter how much success I might find as 'Mark Twain,' the world still knew I'd plundered that identity. I made a failure of Clemens, and I never earned the right to be Mark Twain. So now who shall I be, brother Thomas?*"

I saw what was happening, but was unable to stop it.

"*I wanted to trade places with you,*" whispered Clemens, while he strangled his brother. The misshapen thing he'd christened Thomas Twain shook and quivered in his grip, its eyeballs bulging horribly. The star-twin visitor was apparently unable to change back from solid flesh to its energy form, because it struggled but could not break free.

"*I wanted us to horse-trade, brother Tom,*" Samuel Clemens crooned to the thing in his hands, while he lovingly tightened his stranglehold. "*As I told my daughter Clara on my deathbed: you and I, brother Tom, we were Jekyll and Hyde, but I never figured out which of us was which. I wanted you to be Sam Clemens for a while, to see if you'd do any better in the pilot-house than I did, while I could sit in your place on the passenger deck. I*

wanted to give you the chew and take back the plug. And if you piloted Clemens's life just as badly as I did, **IT WOULD NOT BE MY FAULT . . .**"

"For God's sake, man, stop it!" I shouted. "You're *killing* him!" I tried again to restrain Clemens, to rescue his brother, but the barrier held; I was unable to touch them.

Thomas Twain suddenly gasped; I heard a snap, and then his head tumbled backwards on its neck. Clemens let go of him and Thomas Twain fell, his grotesque deformed body twitching spasmodically. After a time he stopped moving, and Clemens and I watched him in silence.

"Right. That's it, then," I said to the murderer. "Now what?"

"And now, if you'll excuse me," said Samuel Clemens, relighting his cigar with another hot coal while he helped himself to some more of my brandy, "I must be off. I'm late for work."

"What sort of work?" I asked of him.

"Oh, I make myself useful," said Mark Twain. "You've no doubt heard of the ferryman Charon, who ferried the souls of the damned to Hades across the river Styx? Well, old Charlie — as we call him — had to give up the job a few years back, on account of his chilblains; he couldn't take the damp. So the Superintendent of Hell — yes, the Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of the place — offered Charlie a job closer to the fire, and advertised for a new ferry captain, preferably with piloting experience. I assured him that, after wrestling the Mississippi for so many years, I could navigate the Styx blindfolded. Then I slipped Brother Satan five dollars, and he gave me the job. I am the new riverboat captain on the Styx Line to Hell, sir — departures hourly, one-way passages for all, children travel half-price, group rates for Congressmen and bank presidents, no round-trip tickets obtainable — and if you plan on relocating to Hades, sir — for I seem to recall seeing your name on one of our upcoming passenger lists — I will gladly reserve you a seat on the observation deck, near the pilot-house."

"Not just yet, thanks," I said. "I'm still hoping for an upper berth in Heaven, although I am told that Hell offers far more extensive entertainment facilities. I believe there are advantages to Heaven, though: the rent is cheaper, and the plumbing works. And I see no particular reason why I should suffer the eternal torments of Hell, since I have already spent three days in San Francisco."

"Suit yourself," Mark Twain shrugged. "Angels' wings don't appeal to me, though. I'm allergic to feathers."

"On your way out," I said, "please dispose of this corpse you've deposited on my carpet, and . . ."

I stopped. The cadaver of Thomas Twain had disappeared. I looked up again, to confront Samuel Clemens, but in the instant in which I had looked away from him the fellow had vanished. On the far wall, the window that I had shut was now open, and letting in the cold air of the February London. I heard a sound in the distance just then, like the call of a steam-

whistle.

I went to the window and looked. It was a dark night, with not even a toenail-paring of moon, but by the receding glow of Halley's Comet I saw, or thought I saw, a dark shape moving down the Thames, towards Chelsea Bridge.<sup>1</sup> In the dimness and distance I could not be certain, but it looked like a paddlewheel steamboat.

Although I regretted the death of Thomas Twain, I still felt some relief that he and his counterpart brother were gone. "I'm glad that's over with," I thought, half-aloud. "Now perhaps I can get . . ."

"Excuse me," said the floor lamp.

One seldom knows what reply to make to floor lamps . . . or to light bulbs, rather, since the voice had emanated from a light bulb in the top of the lamp. After considering several pithy japes on the order of "Watt are you and wire you in my ohm?" or "Yes, my precious, coulomb, coulomb!" I discarded them, and made a statement much more to the point: "Um, er, ah, well, that is . . ."

"Oh, pardon. *Is it safe to come out?*" A fragment of light detached itself from the glow of the light bulb's filament, passed through the glass shell of the bulb, and hovered near the fireplace. "*It's me again,*" said the comet-wanderer.

"Thomas Twain? I thought that Clemens had killed you."

"*The reports of my death,*" said the glimmer of light, "*have been greatly . . .*"

"Never mind. Why did you come here?"

"*I have spent,*" said the visitor, "*nearly seventy-six of your planet's years on Earth, within Clemens's mind. I was unable to leave Earth, but gradually I came to like the place. You humans are an interesting species, despite your regrettable peculiarities.*"

"Thank you," I said. "We try our best."

"*And it is lonely out there, in the voidness of space. My vessel Star-Mother contains me, nurtures me during the sleep between the stars, but this is never enough. I seek companionship.*"

"Are there no others of your people?" I asked.

"*The wanderers? Man, there are many thousand-millions of us! But it chances so seldom that two comets pass close to one another. Most of the time, for the long many years when our comet-ships ride free between worlds, my people sleep. But when I dwelt on Earth, in the mind of Samuel Clemens, I was alive, and knew other minds, and tasted pleasures and life!*"

I was beginning to understand. "And so now that Halley's Comet brought you close to Earth again, you . . ."

"*Oh, human-born man, have you never been homesick? I have not tasted this world for many severals of years . . . not since 1910. I could not resist one more visit . . . a brief one, this time, as I soon must return to Star-Mother. But for now . . . well, as Mark Twain almost said once: When one has been absent from a planet for seventy-six years, there is much news to*

learn when one comes back."

"Why did you pretend to be Mark Twain," I asked, "when you arrived here this evening?"

"I knew no other form I might inhabit so well as his. Besides, he had often wanted me to take a turn at being Samuel Clemens, and see how painful it was."

"Was that really Mark Twain," I asked, "who returned here just now?"

"It was the part of him, I think, that held his madness," said my visitor. "Did he really come from Hell? I don't know; such districts are beyond my province. I think perhaps that, when Mark Twain lived in this house in Tedworth Square, in 1896, some part of his dementia — the fear of his own mind's dual nature, the agony of a man who hid from his creditors while his daughter died alone — was so strong that it permeated the walls of this place, and it waited and ripened and grew, until it burst forth tonight. You grasp the concept that this entails?"

"Ghuh," I responded. "Well, no, but it'll probably sneak up on me when I'm not looking. I say, what was that invisible thing I bumped into? That barrier surrounding you and Clemens?"

"I did that," said the comet-born one. "A simple stasis of photons; any infant could do it with fifty years' practice. I didn't want you to interfere when Samuel Clemens killed me."

"What, you wanted him to kill . . ."

"I wanted him to do what he found necessary to find peace. And if changing myself into physical matter, and allowing him to destroy what he perceived as his mind's darker self, would bring him peace, I was willing to do it. And yet I had hoped, after so long an absence, that he would greet me more warmly. For I dwelt in his mind for more than seventy years, and I loved him."

"Like a brother, of course," I suggested.

"No. Something more. You see, Samuel Clemens called me 'Thomas,' but I think that perhaps a more suitable name would have been . . ." the visitor paused, "Tamsyn, or even Thomasina."

Then the visitor came forward, in a glistening of light, and I felt her touch my mind. There was a warmth upon my forehead and my face, like sunlight's whispering . . . but it was light that came from far beyond the sun, for the comet in her interstellar flight had harvested light from the stars. And for a moment she was present within me, and I within her. Then the thought spoke: "Farewell," and I saw the dancing light approach my window. "Star-Mother beckons."

The visitor was gone. But I looked out the window and saw, far in distance away, in the sky above Battersea Bridge, the blazing light of Halley's Comet as it drew away from Earth. And the sight was so magnificent that, as I witnessed it, I held one precious thought: *There simply MUST be some way to make a buck out of this. . . .*

And then I was alone. I heard the bells of Saint Luke's Church, in Sydney Street just across the way, striking seven; and I realised that the night was over, and it was very nearly dawn. The sun sneaked out from behind Chelsea Barracks, buttoning its trousers and looking rather pleased with itself after having been out all night.

"Is that the last of it, then?" I asked the floor lamp. "No more extraterrestrials setting up light housekeeping in your lampshade, I trust? Well, wall? Any poltergeists in your pinewood panels, perchance? Hullo, armchair: any apparitions in your upholstery, then? I say there, television: got any ghosts for me? Any banshees taken up lodgings in your videorthicon thingummy? Any ghouls, any ghosts, any goblins today? Speak up, spooks: any spectres to speak of? What? None whatever?"

Silence.

"Remarkable," I said. "I do believe that I'm well and truly alone at last. I wonder if. . ."

The door burst open, and a hideous thing staggered forth. "*In God's name, sir, help me!*" it screeched.

The intruder was apparently a man, but his form was so haggard and gaunt that he seemed to be more skeletal than human. His clothes were filthy rags, his long grey beard was entangled with bits of leaves and dried blood. His entire body was thickly encrusted with every imaginable sort of filth, and the very odour of his flesh filled the room with so odious a stench that for a moment I mistook him for my publishing agent. The cadaverous intruder collapsed on my doorstep, rasping fitfully, his tongue swollen with thirst. There was dust in the wrinkles of his face, and his eyes — blue, flecked reddish with bloodshot — were grown wide with the sight of unknown horrors.

"*Some brandy, for charity's sake!*" he pleaded, and I ran to fetch a glassful. He consumed it greedily. "*Many thanks, friend,*" he coughed, and I swear there was dust in his throat.

I gave him the rest of the bottle. "I never imagined," he gasped, between draughts, "that when those Aztec priests forced me to ingest their immortality elixir, it would take me seventy-two years to escape."

"Aztec priests?" I asked, picking up the nearest blunt instrument, and coming towards him. "*Immortality elixir? Seventy-two years?*"

"That is correct," said the dust-covered man. "I am the war correspondent for the *Washington American*. The name's Bierce, Ambrose Bierce, and . . ."

I let out a screech that must have rattled window-panes in Stoke Newington, as I grabbed the old wretch by the seat of his neck and the scruff of his trousers, and I pitched him headlong down the stairs. He landed butt-over-appetite, hurtled over the doorstep, and scurried off into the darkness whence he had come. One literary looney per week is quite enough for me just at present, thanks, and I hope that's the end of them. But I plan on

sleeping with a contraband Heckler & Koch modified full-automatic pistol tucked under my pillow from now on, just in case H. P. Lovecraft shows up some dark night, selling tickets for the Second Coming of Cthulhu. I mean, *really!*

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<sup>1</sup>At this juncture some knowledgeable reader will point out that Chelsea Bridge — although within walking distance of Mark Twain's London home — cannot be seen from Tedworth Square, and that on the morning of 9 February, 1986, Halley's Comet as viewed from Earth was in the southern constellation Aquila, and therefore could not be observed from London's 51°30' north latitude position.

There is, however, a very simple and obvious explanation, which I shall gladly reveal as soon as I figure out what it is.

### **“But Seriously, Though . . .”**

Reality is scarier than fiction. All my fanciful bits about comets and ghosts are encrusting one nugget of fact: Mark Twain's counterpart self, the *Doppelgänger* Thomas Twain, *actually existed*.

In Mark Twain's diary entry for 7 January 1897 he reveals how, four nights earlier — in the house in Tedworth Square — he first encountered his *Doppelgänger* form. Explicitly comparing his twin selves with Jekyll and Hyde, Twain describes, in detail, the physical appearance of his Other. A visitor from nightmare? Perhaps, but what matters is that Twain genuinely believed, for the rest of his life, that *the Other was real*.

Twain never revealed his *Doppelgänger's* name. I have christened it Thomas: not only for the Biblical twin, but for Thomas Blankenship — Samuel Clemens's raffinate in boyhood Missouri — who was the real-life inspiration for Huckleberry Finn, just as young Sam Clemens was the model for Tom Sawyer. The recurring Thomas-twins in Mark Twain's stories (as recounted in *my tale*) reveal, I think, one of Mark Twain's most intimate secrets: he wanted to escape his own painful life, and become Tom Blankenship.

Mark Twain's diary, describing his encounter with his alternate self, is now included in the Mark Twain Papers of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Among the other finds in the collection are:

- \* *Which Was the Dream?*, Mark Twain's proto-SF manuscript, depicting a shadow-figure known as Thomas X., who seeks an identity.
- \* “A Letter from the Comet,” a science-fiction story written by Mark Twain from the viewpoint of a sentient comet!
- \* An SF novella, *3,000 Years Among the Microbes*, narrated by a being who is partly Mark Twain, partly Thomas Blankenship, and partly

something other than human . . .

- \* My personal favourite, a manuscript which Mark Twain wrote for the *Buffalo Express* in 1869, the hero of which — for reasons not wholly coincidental — bears the same name as myself.

Literary remains such as these tend to be published — often in unfinished or inconsistently revised forms — by university presses now and then. Is Berkeley too far? All but (sorry!) the last are in two volumes edited by John S. Tuckey for the University of California Press: *Mark Twain's Which Was the Dream?* (1966) and *Mark Twain's Fables of Man* (1972).

After libraries fail you, do you desire further enlightenment? You shall have it! Queries from SF readers, Mark Twain societies, or Hugo Award nominating committees (*ahem!*), if sent to me in care of this magazine or at my address below, and enclosing SASE, will receive by return post further information of Mark Twain's *Doppelgänger*, citing verifiable sources. I don't make these things up, you know. G'day, cobbers!

— F. Gwyuplaine MacIntyre  
Number Six, Albemarle Way  
Clerkenwell, London EC1V 4JB  
United Kingdom

*The author left Waralunga, Australia, at an early age and never looked back. He is finishing work on an SF novel with a cast of characters that includes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker, and Aleister Crowley . . . all three of whom he expects to see materialize on his doorstep demanding a share of the royalties.*

## ACQUIRED TASTE

A creature that lived in a pond  
with tentacular reach would abscond  
with strong men and true,  
and old ladies too,  
and children, of which it was fond.

— Darrell Schweitzer

# THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT ζ by Grendel Briarton art: Tim Kirk

*The story of Mr. Briarton's realization that the letters EFGHOOT, in his possession at a point in a Scrabble® game, had in sum to mean something, has been told.*

*It was, of course, a proper name — but by now its bearer has joined those who, like Guillotine and Burke and Boycott, have added to the richness of our language.*



"It is an oudraitch!" screamed Dr. Gropius Volkswagen. "I myself, Chairman of the Society for the Aesthetic Rearrangement of History, sent this Ferdinand Feghoot back to 1985, to this kibbutz on the West Bank, where history is so untidy. He was away much too long, and we received only one brief message from him. We all thought he was risking his miserable life every day to tidy things up. Now a confidential informant has told us that during his whole stay there was only peace and tranquility. No rockets! No Arab terrorists! And do you know what he was doing, this brave Feghoot? Ha! He was operating agricultural machinery! Also he was running the kibbutz's rabbit farm!"

The Society, of course, voted unanimously to summon Feghoot to defend himself, and he duly appeared before them.

"Here is the man who has wasted our money!" Dr. Volkswagen bellowed. "Here is the hero who let us believe he was risking his life every minute! Feghoot, what can you say for yourself?"

"My dear Doctor," said Ferdinand Feghoot. "My message made no such claim. Surely you recorded what I said on the trans-temporal telephone? Goodness knows I said it clearly enough. I told you that much of the time I spent there was harrowing, and that I was having many hare-raising experiences. I also asserted quite truthfully that evenings and holidays were always a time of *hora*."

# HUGO GERNSBACK

## The Man Who Gave His Name to the "Hugo" and Birth to *Amazing*<sup>®</sup>

by T. W. Black  
art: Alix Berenzy

The name Hugo Gernsback has become synonymous with science fiction, science fact, and science future. He was part scientist, part inventor, part promoter, part joker, and part little boy.

Gernsback not only coined the term "television," but also produced the medium's first commercial broadcast. In 1911, he predicted radar, computers, broadcast networks, fluorescent lights, tape recorders, microfilm, synthetic fabrics, and night baseball. These predictions were all found in his novel *Ralph 124C41 +*, which also included a diagram for radar, an invention made practicable by British scientist Sir Robert Watson-Watt twenty + years later.

Gernsback founded the first electronics magazine, the first sex magazine, and the first all-"scientifiction" magazine, *Amazing Stories*. The term "scientifiction" was Gernsback's, but he changed that rather cumbersome name for the genre to "science fiction" in 1929. And once it had a local habitation and a name, there followed its growth to what we have now. Dr. Isaac Asimov, a winner of several Hugo awards, remarks: "By publishing the first science-fiction magazine, Gernsback made it possible for me to grow interested in the field and become what I am today." Who in science fiction, writer and reader alike, wouldn't echo this debt in some form or another?

Born in Luxembourg of wealthy parents, Hugo Gernsback began his career in science at the age of 6 when the caretaker of his father's estate gave the boy a primitive battery-bell mechanism. Hugo immediately took the device apart, figured out how it worked, and began installing improved bells of his own design in friends' houses.

When he was 13, the Mother Superior of a nearby convent hired young Hugo to equip the convent with call bells. However, when it was learned that Hugo was 13, and in the eyes of the convent "a man," the Mother Superior had to request — and received — a special dispensation from Pope Leo XIII. Hugo Gernsback's widow, Mary, still has a copy of Pope Leo's official dispensation — in Latin, to be sure.

"As a boy," Mary explained, "Hugo fell in love with the United States. He read many of Twain's novels. He especially liked *Huckleberry Finn* and began calling himself Huck Gernsback. I guess he was part Huck, for he was a practical joker."

Gernsback left Luxembourg with a few hundred dollars in his pocket and



headed for America, turn-of-the-century America, the land of Twain's incredible yarns and of Horatio Alger myths. But Hugo's was not a rags-to-riches story (as others have contended); rather, Gernsback being from the European middle class, he saw America more as an adventure.

Landing in New York in 1903, Gernsback took his talents, and a battery he had invented, to the Packard Motor Car Co. At 375 amperes, the battery was much too powerful for Packard, and Hugo had to redesign it. With the money he earned from Packard royalties, Hugo opened a small business, Electro Importing Company, and invented the world's first home radio, almost a decade before radio stations as such existed. Selling for \$7.50, the "Telimco Wireless" (Gernsback named Telimco after his company, taking the first two letters of each word and adding the beginning "T") was both a transmitter and a receiver. Today, a replica of the Telimco is among the exhibits in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

In 1908, Hugo made a decision which would change his life and in time establish science fiction as a recognized and respected genre of literature; in that year he founded the first radio magazine, *Modern Electrics*, and began his career as a publisher. In an editorial, Gernsback suggested that the power and wavelength of future radio stations (he thought we would have them someday) be regulated by the government: else, he predicted, there would be anarchy on the airwaves. His editorial, nearly word for word, became the Wireless Act of 1912, regulating an industry that did not yet exist. For better or worse, Gernsback should be credited with the concept of the Federal Communications Commission. Strictly for the better, however, Gernsback's *Modern Electrics* achieved a circulation of 100,000 by 1911, the year in which he began serialization in the magazine of the prophetic *Ralph 124C41* +.

"I must confess," Gernsback wrote in an introduction to a hardbound edition of the novel, "I do not recall just what prompted me to write *Ralph*. I do recall that I had no plan whatsoever for the whole of the story. I had no idea how it would end, nor what the contents would be."

The novel ran for twelve months in Gernsback's *Modern Electrics*, with Hugo writing an installment for each issue. Hugo recalled: "As the story developed from month to month there was the age-old scramble to beat the deadline — but somehow or other I always made it — usually under duress, finishing the installment at 3 or 4 A.M. on the last day. That the literary quality suffered painfully under such continuous *tours de force* every month, there can be no question, but somehow the scientific and technical content came through unscathed most of the time."

That last sentence accurately reflects Gernsback's idea of what a "scientification" story was supposed to be: a story based on science, but which used science as a launching pad for the writer's imagination. Prose took second place to prophecy. Between the completion of *Ralph* and the August 1923 edition of Gernsback's *Science and Invention*, which was a special "scientification num-

ber," Hugo Gernsback published 171 "scientifiction" stories in his magazines *Modern Electrics*, *Electrical Experimenter*, *Science and Invention*, and *Radio News*. And his dream was to publish an entire magazine devoted to "scientifiction stories."

Yet, Gernsback's success in publishing rested on his ability to juggle the contents of his magazines. Most of the magazines' contents was fact, not fiction. Like any other publisher, Gernsback worried about the two basic colors of ink used in keeping the books: red and black. "Scientifiction" was a treat, a little fantasy amid the scientific fact — but would his readers consume a steady diet in the form of a magazine devoted solely to the treat?

The August 1923 issue of *Science and Invention* was the trial balloon. Of the six authors who appeared in that August 1923 issue only two, Gernsback and Ray Cummings, are more than footnotes in the history of science fiction. Gernsback wrote "The Electric Duel," a precursor of the *Star Wars* Jedi-Knight sword fights. Cummings's entry was part II of a six-part serial entitled "Around the Universe." All the stories had one thing in common, however; each was based on a technological product or an accepted scientific theory.

While reader response to Gernsback's "all scientifiction" issue experiment was positive, it was not overwhelming, and in early 1924 Hugo sent out 25,000 inquiries to his *Radio News* subscribers announcing plans for a magazine called *Scientifiction*. What, he asked, did his *Radio News* readers think of the idea?

Not much. Subscription orders failed to come through and Gernsback abandoned the idea. Or, to be more precise, Hugo stopped the countdown, for he didn't entirely give up. He continued to publish "scientifiction" stories in his science periodicals — but the term "scientifiction" was not exactly a household word. Since his subscription campaign had not worked, Gernsback realized that the circulation of such a "scientifiction" magazine would be dependent upon newsstand sales; and while the title of his proposed magazine was accurate, it was also threatening to the newsstand browser.

"Anything that smacks of science," Gernsback wrote at the time, "seems to be too deep for the average type of reader."

Gernsback had been publishing long enough to have developed a healthy cynicism for the newsstand reader, and he thought that while a person might not be able to judge a book by its cover, a publisher could sell a publication with a title. To catch the reader's eye amid the scores of other newsstand publications, a publisher had to be "catchy": hence the title *Amazing Stories*.

After all, the 1920s were an "amazing" decade, the embodiment of Horatio Alger's "from rags to riches" — why, any hard-working shoeshine boy could become a millionaire overnight. But Gernsback was not so naïve. Just because every magazine he had begun up until that time had been a success

was no reason for Hugo to believe he might not have one colossal flop which would cost him everything. He proceeded cautiously, and in April 1926, the first science-fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, appeared. In 8" x 11" format and on thick paper to increase the bulk of its 96 pages, *Amazing Stories* did not look like any other pulp publication on the newsstand. It did indeed live up to its title. Frank R. Paul's cover illustration of ice-skaters on a frozen moon, with Saturn dwarfing the background, was more than amazing: it was arresting. It leaped out from the newsstand. Blazoned on the cover were three authors' names: Jules Verne, Edgar Allan Poe, and H. G. Wells. Ironically, except for Paul's color cover, there was nothing new in the magazine. The stories were all reprints, most of them reprints of the household names just mentioned above. Gernsback had hedged his bet and minimized his chances for failure. Readers were certainly familiar with those names; and, in the case of Poe and Verne, their stories were in the public domain, costing Gernsback nothing to reprint. Gernsback was not appealing to the purists, but rather to the masses. He had to. With a cover price of 25¢, *Amazing Stories* cost more than twice as much as other adventure-oriented magazines.

On the contents page of the first issue was a drawing of the tomb of Jules Verne, which depicted the writer rising from his grave. Below the drawing was the motto: "Extravagant Fiction Today — Cold Fact Tomorrow." Until Gernsback lost control of the magazine in 1929, Verne rose from the grave every month and his stories were reprinted as well. For the first two years *Amazing Stories* used reprints to fill editorial space, and it was not until the third issue of the magazine that Gernsback used any new fiction. The type of fiction that Gernsback wanted was already being written, but not in sufficient quantity or quality to sustain a monthly publication.

Gernsback never intended *Amazing Stories* to be revolutionary; rather he saw it as evolutionary — a logical outgrowth of the "scientifiction" seeds he had been sowing for over a dozen years in his scientific magazines. He was giving birth to an idea, and if his baby needed a bit of nursing along with the help of some big-name writers, he was not about to toss the baby out because the bath water wasn't pure. His long-range plans for his "child" included developing it into a mass-circulation magazine, the revenue from which would allow him to pay high rates and encourage new authors in the field.

Frank Paul's cover illustrations, perhaps more than any other single factor, helped sell the magazine. In many ways, his artistic contributions to science fiction have been overlooked. He was the first special-effects man, the illustrator who breathed life — or perhaps fire — onto the covers of *Amazing Stories*. Paul had an uncanny gift for rendering the conceivable development of any invention, and he was quite apt at taking a fresh idea and turning it into a color fantasy which was in line with every descriptive detail of a writer's prosaic design. Paul's illustrations were each worth several thousand words.

Paul went on, of course, to become "The Dean of Science-Fiction Illustrators," and in 1939, when the first World Science Fiction Convention met in New York, it was Frank R. Paul who was the guest of honor; he was chosen above all the contemporary science-fiction writers of the time. His covers lent credence to the magazine's title. After all, a flying saucer from outer space snagging the Woolworth Building (in 1929 the tallest structure in New York) from its foundation was no ordinary cover illustration: it was A-M-A-Z-I-N-G. Ironically, that particular cover illustration was not intended to illustrate any particular story, but it was just too good an illustration for Gernsback to pass up.

That Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* was a hit would be an understatement: it was a grand slam. Newsstands sold out. That first issue contained Gernsback's philosophy of "scientifiction," a philosophy which would influence the next generation of science-fiction writers.

"By scientifiction I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe [there was more than coincidence at work here — considering these were the three bylined authors of the cover] type of story; a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision."

Gernsback had his own prophetic vision of the magazine, for in the editorial he later wrote:

"Many great scientifiction stories destined to be of historical interest are still being written and *Amazing Stories* will be the medium through which such stories will come to you. Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well."

That was the key for Hugo Gernsback. He believed that prophecy was more important than prose; that through predictions came progress — for someone somewhere might be stirred to invent the "invention" which the "scientifiction" author was describing, or Paul was illustrating.

After a few issues of *Amazing Stories*, some of the readers began to grow impatient for the great science-fiction story that destiny would make room for. Letters poured into Gernsback's New York office complaining about his reliance on reprints. The readers wanted new writers. In response to this criticism, Gernsback wrote editorials appealing to his readership for new writers, writers who were both fertile and original, but who wrote with a firm knowledge of technology. The response was immediate, and within a year Gernsback's reliance on reprints dwindled.

*Amazing Stories* had another thing going for it: the decade of the 1920s was the beginning of specialized magazines. Of course, in comparison to today's market, which has every specialized publication one can think of from *Aerobics* to *Zip Code Mailer*, this specialization was quite a bit less narrow; but in the Roaring Twenties anything novel received more than just a passing glance — it received attention. The readers of the magazine were overwhelmingly male, many college graduates in their twenties who were employed in professional or technical occupations. And there were younger

readers as well — readers with names like Simak, Williamson, and Hamilton. By the third issue, an interesting byproduct had developed. *Fandom*. Gernsback wrote in the magazine:

"One of the great surprises since we started publishing *Amazing Stories* is the tremendous amount of mail we receive from — shall we call them 'Scientifiction Fans'? — who seem to be pretty well oriented in this sort of literature. From their suggestions for reprints that are coming in, these 'fans' seem to have a hobby of their own of hunting up scientifiction stories, not only in English, but in many other languages."

By the January 1927 issue of *Amazing*, Gernsback, totally inundated with the volume of letters from fans, began a "Discussions" column — on the line of a letters-to-the-editor. Unlike publications of today which merely list the hometown of the correspondent, Gernsback provided the exact street address of each correspondent. The result was the beginning of *fandom*. The publication of the precise address, a rather simple thing, allowed for the fanatics to write to one another and to look up other fanatics in their home neighborhoods. Or, failing that, there was always a letter exchange. Science-fiction clubs would soon follow. Had Gernsback merely published the correspondent's home town — without the complete address — it is doubtful that fandom would have begun as early as the 1920s.

While Gernsback was launching *Amazing Stories*, he did not forsake his other publications. In February 1927 he wrote an editorial for *Radio News* suggesting that we could radio the planets. Not only that, but we could make radio contact with the moon in 2.4 seconds. Critics scoffed at Gernsback; they said that *Amazing Stories* had gone to his head and such nonsense did not belong in such an august journal as *Radio News*. Gernsback wrote that we would establish radio contact with the moon in 20 years.

He was wrong. It happened 19 years later. On January 10, 1946, the United States Signal Corps detected a radio transmission bounced off the moon. True two-way communication — at last with TV live from the moon! — did have to wait a while longer.

In 1928, Gernsback turned his imagination to "television," a word he had first used in print in 1909. He began a magazine of the same name — it failed, after one issue. No one knew what he was talking about. But he persisted in his experimental commercial broadcasts, using his radio station WRNY as a transmission source. Transmission of images (but sound was out of the question) was not sophisticated; rather, it was similar to newspaper halftones — but Gernsback had the audacity to take out an ad in the *New York Times* with his program schedule. The general public, which had no idea what Hugo was up to in 1928, would be thrilled by the new invention of television at the 1939 New York World's Fair. For all of his life Hugo seemed to try to make "the Amazing Story" a reality.

In 1928, Gernsback made a few changes in *Amazing Stories*, including more new material and switching the wildly successful 1927 companion

magazine, *Amazing Stories Annual*, to a quarterly with a cover price of 50¢. But it was the August 1928 edition of *Amazing Stories* which finally lived up to its adjective with the publication of two authors: Edward Elmer Smith and Philip Nowlan. In the development of science fiction few novels are as revolutionary as Edward Elmer Smith's *The Skylark of Space*. Written by a Ph.D. in Chemistry, *Skylark* was the first significant space opera, a novel which included a story line in which earthlings go outside the solar system and meet alien races, engage in combat with those aliens, and reach the limits — up to then — of exotic adventure. Or, to paraphrase *Star Trek*'s famous opening: Smith had goose where no writer had goose before. *The Skylark of Space*, written between 1915 and 1919, had been rejected by a score of magazines and book publishers before the food company chemist submitted his manuscript to *Amazing Stories* in serialized form. Serials were bread-and-butter items to Gernsback, for they kept the non-subscribing newsstand buyers (the vast majority) coming back for more installments of a story. A "cliff hanger" worked just as well in magazine form as it did at the Saturday matinee at the Bijou. Gernsback offered Smith \$75 for the work, payable on or after publication. Payment on or after publication was in the publisher's, not the writer's interest, for it allowed the publisher to stockpile material without compensating the author, until such time as the publisher chose to use the material. It was a dubious procedure at best, for it meant that an author might not receive payment for his work for years — if ever, should the publisher choose not to print it. Yet it was a common practice of magazines of the 1920s and is still the bane of many magazine writers today. But Smith, though delighted to have found a publisher after so many years of searching, held out for — and got — \$125. But — more important than money — publication brought him acclaim and demand for more of his work. Edward Elmer Smith, Ph.D., went on to become one of the most successful writers of science fiction in the 1930s. In truth, many of the science-fiction writers did not write for money anyway, contrary to what Dr. Johnson said about anyone who didn't write for money being a blockhead; and they would have taken no payment for publication of their works — they wrote for recognition. Witness Philip Nowlan, the supernova who appeared in the August 1928 issue with publication of his short story "Armageddon — 2419 A.D." Nowlan appeared with considerably less fanfare than Smith did; but ironically few people outside the world of science-fiction fandom remember "Doc" Smith, while the entire world knows of Nowlan's brainchild — Buck Rogers in the Twenty-Fifth Century. In his story, Nowlan introduced Anthony Rogers, a man from the present who awakens in the future in the middle of a war between the overlords of Asia (who have conquered the United States) and American survivors who are fighting a guerrilla war against their Asian conquerors. After the story was printed in *Amazing*, Nowlan was approached by John F. Dille, head of a national newspaper syndicate, who wanted to know if Nowlan would adapt

the story into a comic strip.

Yes. Nowlan would do the script and Dick Calkins, the syndicate's staff artist, would draw the panels. Among the apprentice cartoonists who worked on the strip was a young man named Zack Mosley who would later create "Smilin' Jack," an aviation comic that ran for forty years. Buck Rogers appeared for the first time on January 7, 1929, in the "funny pages." That same day, across the page from Buck, was Tarzan's debut, as adapted from *Amazing Stories* contributor Edgar Rice Burroughs's "lesser works" — in the eyes of SF fans anyway. "Tarzan" was drawn by Hal Foster, who would later leave the jungle for the Middle Ages when "Prince Valiant" made its debut. And Philip Nowlan would go on to write other stories for *Amazing*, but he would make his living in the 25th century.

*Amazing Stories* was going quite well when Gernsback decided to publish another magazine in a different area: sex. Entitled *Your Body* with a subtitle *Know Thyself*, the magazine contained a cross section of material on hygiene, sex, medicine, and health; it was the forerunner of Hugo Gernsback's later success, *Sexology*. Every issue of *Your Body* contained articles under the heading "Sex Problems" with doctors providing advice or solution to the "problems." Detailed explanations of the mechanics of reproduction (whether it was radar or a human machine, Hugo liked to give his readers blueprints of the device), including cross sections of sex organs both at play and at rest, were included at a time when most hardback book publishers shied away from such material. In some ways *Your Body* was more amazing than *Amazing Stories* for the simple fact that it was even published. And, with some degree of accuracy, it might be said that SEX was the undoing of the first science-fiction magazine: *Amazing Stories*.

Bernarr McFadden, publisher of *Physical Culture*, a magazine which featured articles on nudism, sex, diet, and back-to-naturism, saw *Your Body* as a threat to his publishing empire and Gernsback a thorn in his side generally. McFadden liked to consider himself the oddest duck in New York City, and the big pond wasn't big enough for both Gernsback and him. McFadden was a born press agent for his own magazines and had made a habit out of concocting elaborate stunts to gain publicity for himself and his publications. For example, he liked to walk barefoot through the snow in Central Park to show everyone the wonderful powers of health foods, diet, and exercise, which folks could read about in the next issue. But in Hugo Gernsback, McFadden had a true competitor for oddest duck; and the younger man was causing a sensation with not only his *Amazing Stories*, but with his experimental television programs. And Hugo had also rubbed McFadden wrong. One of McFadden's publications was *Ghost Stories*, a magazine which appealed to the ignorance and superstitions of the general public and which consequently had a rather healthy circulation figure. Gernsback irritated McFadden by announcing in *Experimenter Publications* (the collective group of Gernsback publications) that Hugo Gernsback would personally

pay \$10,000 to any medium who could contact the dead. If Hugo had left it at that, perhaps it might have blown over; but Gernsback added insult to injury when he employed a magician to expose the frauds, some of whom were the stars of *Ghost Stories*. In this case, at least, the medium was truly the message; and McFadden decided to get even with the upstart Gernsback. He attempted to duplicate Hugo's *Amazing Stories* success with his own *True Strange Tales*. It didn't succeed. That failure, coupled with Gernsback's success with *Your Body*, left McFadden with one alternative: buy out Hugo Gernsback's Experimenter Publishing Company.

Experimenter Publishing Company included not only *Amazing Stories* and Hugo's other magazines, but radio station WRNY as well. Gernsback had a million-dollar business; but it was a small-stakes operation beside McFadden's publishing empire, which was underwritten by the successful magazine *True Story* and its imposing circulation of two million subscribers. McFadden offered to buy out Gernsback — lock, stock, and stories. Gernsback smiled and replied that he was doing rather well, rather liked the publishing business, was diversifying, had a few new projects in mind, and thanks but no thanks. That wasn't good enough for McFadden. He needed *Your Body* in order to bury it. He wanted *Amazing Stories* because he envied it. And anyone who walked barefoot in winter snow was not a man to give up very easily. If Gernsback didn't sell out, perhaps there were other ways to drive him out.

On a rather bleak day in April 1929, Hugo Gernsback saw his own personal stock crash. Awakened by a *New York Times* reporter, Hugo was asked what was to become of radio station WRNY now that he was bankrupt. Gernsback assumed the reporter was joking, but the *Times* man wasn't. Papers had been filed against Gernsback and Experimenter Publishing for delinquency of debt. Three of Hugo's suppliers — who were also suppliers of McFadden — forced Gernsback's company into court. It wasn't that his company was insolvent but rather it was late in paying its bills; and, according to the laws of the state of New York, three or more creditors could force even a solvent company into bankruptcy merely for late payments. It was a law which allowed banks to swoop down on mortgage holders a day late in payment and sell the property for considerably more than the outstanding mortgage, thereby making a tidy profit. It might have been considered funny if it hadn't had such dire consequences — the fact that the law was changed a week later might have been considered ironic, but not at all amusing to Hugo Gernsback.

Gernsback claimed in court that McFadden was behind all of it, that it was a conspiracy to get him. He produced written offers of purchase of Experimenter Publishing Company signed by McFadden. No one disputed him on the fact that McFadden was interested in buying his publishing company. Nor did anyone dispute Gernsback on the coincidence that the three creditors filing the charges were also suppliers of McFadden. But that

didn't change the law.

After considering the evidence, the authorities said that there was nothing they could do save for the possible exception of preventing McFadden from buying the publishing company: for that would, in effect, prove Hugo's charge of conspiracy against McFadden.

Gernsback was forced to sell everything. Not only did he liquidate Experimenter Publications, putting *Your Body* to rest and selling *Amazing Stories* to Teck publications, but he was forced to sell his apartment as well, for Gernsback was personally responsible for the debts of his publishing company. His creditors would receive \$1.08 on the dollar, which would cause the *New York Times* to write that Gernsback's settlement was "bankruptcy deluxe." But at the age of 45 Hugo Gernsback, six months before the stock market crash, had lost everything he had.

For Gernsback it was the first great failure in his life, and it was a whopper. It didn't matter that people had played fast and loose with the law, he had come out a loser. The magazine which was his showcase, *Radio News*, was gone, as were his radio station and his experimental television programming. But even worse, his favorite child, *Amazing Stories*, was now in someone else's house. He had been editor of *Amazing* for less than three years. He had given the world the first science-fiction magazine, and the courts had taken it away from him. He had lost everything, everything but his spirit.

Within a year, Gernsback began publishing *Wonder Stories*. Like *Amazing Stories* before it, *Wonder Stories* was an immediate hit. But from here on the history of *Amazing Stories* and that of Hugo Gernsback are no longer one. They called him the "Father of Science Fiction" later, when the child had long since grown and gone its own way. Some publishers asked for sensationalism and pseudo-science — all now forgotten. Editors arose who asked for story value and extrapolation: John W. Campbell, Jr., the most eminent of them, developing a whole generation of writers. Theirs and their successors' is the history of science fiction. Gernsback was honored but not heeded. His first-begotten all-SF magazine, in other hands, had its ups and downs — but nobody gave up on it, the thread of its life never snapped. It is before you, again as *Amazing® Stories*. [Some of that history has been recorded in these pages: by Cele Goldsmith Lalli, March 1983; by Robert Bloch, January 1984; and by Howard Browne, May 1984.]

*Wonder Stories* had been sold in 1936, to become, as *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, part of a chain of pulp fiction magazines. In 1953, during a speculative boom in SF magazine publishing, Gernsback re-entered the field with a showy large-format *Science Fiction +*. It lasted for seven issues. That year marked the start of the Science Fiction Achievement Awards, named "Hugo" in his honor. Before his death in 1967 at the age of 83, he too had been honored with a special Hugo (in 1960). For his past achievements.

They were enough. ☪

*T. W. Black, a freelance journalist living in Florida, originally wrote up our founder for the Miami Herald on the 100th anniversary of his birth . . . which the U.S. Postal Service, our friend and adversary, strangely failed to commemorate with a stamp.*



# IN THE BEGINNING

by Harry Harrison  
art: John Lakey

*Space barely allows to give the highlights of Harry Harrison's long professional career, but the DEATHWORLD trilogy is well known, and the adventures of the "Stainless Steel Rat" have been chronicled in a number of popular books. The recent best-selling West of Eden is the first volume of a projected sequence of three.*

There was a little knock on the compartment door that Adam Ward heard and ignored. He had turned the lights off and now sat by the window of the train, looking out at the snow-covered, star-lit slopes of the Rockies as they moved silently past. A tunnel wall suddenly blotted out the view and he pursed his lips in annoyance, the rattling roar of the wheels loud in his ears. The sound ended as suddenly as it had begun; the mountains reappeared. The knocking was louder now on the metal door.

"Go away," he called out, the irritations of the last weeks harsh in his voice. All of the hurried arrangements, interviews, security clearances, annoyances. "Go away, I don't want any."

"Porter, sir. Got to fix up your bed."

"Come back later."

"Got to do it now, sir."

Annoyed at the interruption, Adam shuffled his feet into his slippers and went to the door, unlocked it to send the man away — the bed would be made up when he wanted it — turned the knob.

Took the burst of gas from the spray can full in his face.

He gasped, coughed hoarsely, then fell to the floor.

The big man pushed the door wide, kicked the fallen man's legs out of the way, then slammed it shut as soon as the small man had hurried in behind him. It had taken only a few seconds; they had not been seen.

"You must move quickly," the big man said, squinting at his watch. "This fool was slow in opening the door. There are only four minutes left." He spoke with a note of admonition, as though it were the other's fault.

The small man ignored this and began to undress. Their relationship had been abrasive since they had met, when this operation had first begun. In response to a polite request for the other's name, he had received only a gratuitous insult. "In the cell system we do not use names. You may call me Ivan if that pleases you." The tones had been as insulting as the words.

Under the small man's topcoat he wore a boiler suit with a single zipper. He pulled this down and stepped out of the garment, shivering as the cool



air touched his skin.

"All of it," Ivan said as he pulled the jacket from the recumbent figure, bumping the man's head cruelly on the floor. "Right down to your sweet white skin."

The small man opened his mouth to protest, but did not speak. He watched instead as Ivan swiftly undressed Adam Ward. Listened to the instructions he had heard too often before.

"You are new to this business. Therefore you must listen, memorize — and obey without thinking. Fingerprints and dental charts have been taken care of. Yours have been substituted. But we have heard that the Yankees have been developing odor recognition — smell patterns not unlike speech patterns. You will wear Ward's hopefully reeking underwear as well as his shirt with stinking armpits just in case they want to try this little device on you."

"How tastefully you express it." He spoke, despite his determination not to.

"You are too delicate for this rough business. But better a brittle tool than no tool at all. Dress — quickly!"

He pulled on the other's still-warm clothing, disguising his feelings of revulsion, knowing any reaction would only please Ivan. As he was knotting the tie, the big man looked at his watch and waved him to the far side of the compartment. As though on cue there was a sharp rap: Ivan unlocked the door and pulled it wide. The newcomer grunted as he entered, moving sideways to get through the door. Big; no fat, just bulging muscle. He carried a large suitcase effortlessly in one hand and filled the tiny compartment with his presence.

Ivan stepped up onto the seat to make room, snapping his fingers at the small man. "Get up here, you." Then added, almost as an afterthought, "Tell me your name?"

"Ward. Adam Ward."

"Very good, Adam." A pat on the head for a good dog. They averted as the engine braked and slowed. "You, finish your work, we're coming into the station."

The giant newcomer allowed himself one brief look of contempt before he knelt and opened the suitcase. It was empty. Then he reached out and seized the naked body upon the floor.

"No!" "Adam" said, the single word slipping out. He had known nothing of this.

"Yes," Ivan said, smiling with pleasure. "You would be surprised how small a human being is — when folded up. Particularly a man who weighs just fifty-four and a half kilos. Just what you weigh. See."

With precise motions and apparent ease — had he done this before? — the bearlike man tucked Ward's chin against his chest and slid the torso into the suitcase. Folded the arms neatly, bent the legs and knees back before slip-

ping them into place as well. Adam had a last glimpse of the naked body, of himself, foetus-like inside the case, before the lid snapped shut.

"Ward — open the door and make sure the corridor is empty."

He obeyed the command without thinking. The platform lights of a small station moved into view when he looked through the corridor windows. The train slowed, then stopped.

"No one."

Rough hands pulled him aside and the bearlike man slipped by, the heavy suitcase held lightly in one hand. Ivan went out behind him, turning briefly for one last command.

"I am in the adjoining compartment — but only to be disturbed in dire emergency. I don't want to ever see you again. You know what must be done."

Adam slammed the door harshly, letting it speak for him — at the same time knowing that the other man could not care the slightest.

Alone for the first time, he felt a great relief. His training was finished, all those boring sessions with the gray little men. The operations on his face, the dieting to get down to exactly fifty-four and a half kilos. All that finished and to be forgotten. He brushed the dusty footprints from the seat, then washed his hands in the tiny sink. Sat down in the same spot where Ward had been sitting not five minutes earlier. There was a distant whistle and a clanking as the train started forward. Snow was starting to fall again. He had a brief glimpse of a dark figure putting a large suitcase into a car, then the buildings cut off the sight.

He jumped when there was a knock on the door.

"Porter, sir, come to do up your bed."

Now the real work would begin.

"I assume that you know the very important reason why you have been brought here?" Bhattacharya asked. His twisted body rested at an odd angle in the wheelchair, his hands claw-like with ancient scars. Adam put aside any natural feelings of compassion and spoke the way Ward himself would have spoken.

"You assume incorrectly, Professor Bhattacharya. I was bullied by Federal agents until I agreed to come to this place. My students will take their examinations soon, my own research . . ." He broke off as the fire-scarred hand rose in gentle admonition.

"I am very sorry for any inconvenience. But I assure you that the research you will so ably assist us with here will far surpass your wildest dream." His English was slightly accented, very old-fashioned. "You have met Dr. Levy already, I believe. If you will kindly excuse me, he will explain everything about the Epsilon experiments. I bid you welcome to our most interesting project."

Levy busied himself lighting an ancient and sulphurous pipe as the

wheelchair whined down the corridor and out of sight. He was bald, skinny, relaxed, his face dominated by a nose of heroic proportions. He was one of the top mathematicians in the country — perhaps the world.

"You call me Hymie, I'll call you Adam, more friendly like. Okay?" Adam sniffed mild disapproval and was ignored. "First off we got some control problems and you may be just the guy we need to help. I read your paper on CMOS gate arrays, good stuff. And fast, that's what we need. How many gates do you get into your six-inch wafer?"

"About twenty thousand now. We use three levels of interconnects, two metal and one polysilicon, with 600ps minimum gate delays."

"Marvelous." He nodded happily and puffed out a cloud of noxious smoke. "We can use all that operational speed — and more. Let me tell you why. The Epsilon project is one that went wrong — or rather right — by accident. What it started out to be is no longer relevant. They were hitting samples with high-energy proton streams, different samples, more and more power. They got from alpha to beta and on up to delta with no results. Epsilon gave them more than they bargained for. With this experiment they punched a hole into something or somewhere — and no one, not even the great Professor Bhattacharya, has the foggiest of what has been done."

"Are you being facetious, Dr. Levy?"

"Hymie to my friends, Adam. Be a friend. We are like one big happy family here. And to answer your question — no, I'm not. I'm a very serious guy. Come along and I'll show you what I'm talking about."

There must have been six inches of glass between the control room and the experimental laboratory, yet Adam could feel his hair stir as the electrical charge built up, then discharged with a most impressive display of sparking activity.

"You could light up Detroit for a week with all that juice," Hymie said. "I'm glad the government's paying the electrical bill. And what, you might ask, do we get for all that effort? We get that." He pointed to the monitor screen where a spot of light blinked for a second, then vanished — the sort of spark you see when your television set is turned off. "Not too impressive. But let me amplify the picture and slow it down."

This time the screen showed a jagged metal hole with what resembled a pool of mercury at the bottom.

"Plenty of magnification. The biggest one of these we've done so far has been less than two millimeters wide and lasted all of five hundred milliseconds. That's when we made the temperature experiment. It worked, too — though not in the way that we had expected." He searched through the video cassettes scattered on the table, found the right one, and inserted it into the machine. "Very clear picture, very slowed down."

There were the rough metal walls again, the shining pool at the bottom. Suddenly a thick rod came into view, sliding down towards the surface. It came close, moving towards its mirrored image until they touched, kept

moving downwards for an appreciable length of time. Then it stopped and withdrew — to show a truncated end. Most of the rod was missing.

"Melted — or burnt off," Adam said.

"Neither. No temperature rise. If anything a brief lowering of the temperature. No metallic particles emitted. It just went in — and never came out. And before you ask, it didn't come out the other side because, and I find this utterly fascinating, the silvery surface has no other side. Can you imagine a substance with only a single surface? It's like trying to think of the sound of one hand clapping."

The next morning Adam Ward arrived at the lab promptly at nine and quickly found himself immersed in the work. In another life — under another name that he never permitted himself to think about — he had done related research. Not on this scale, not with this sort of funding, but work that had been closely related to the control circuitry he was helping to design now. He had done this until his Country had Called — or rather the heavysset men in the dark coats who had shown him why he had no choice but to help. All this was forgotten as he worked with the others to discover the secret of that silvery entity.

When his alarm watch pinged, he at first could not remember why it had been set. The letters on the face of the watch simply read MESSAGE. Message? From whom? No, not from anyone but to someone; his spirits sank with the memory. He was now Adam Ward. But he was someone else as well — and the message was a grim reminder of that. It was time to report to those across the Atlantic who had sent him here. He was not at his best for the remainder of the day and left early, blaming a headache. In the security of his room he took out his programmable calculator and shook out the handful of magnetized strips that were the various programs and formulae that he used; he found the one with the encoding program. He slowly typed his report into the calculator's memory, ran it through the encoding program, then recorded it on another magnetic strip. Without the code it was just electronic hash. He went to bed troubled, but slept well as he always did.

After work the next day he followed the routine that he had established on the previous three Fridays. He drove first to the car wash, paid, then watched until he saw the government Plymouth dragged into the watery tunnel. Then he crossed the road to Mom's Bar and Grill for a glass of beer. The bar was not what might be called exclusive but at least the beer was cold. He finished the glass quickly, as he always did, then went to the grimy toilet and locked the door behind him. It took only a few seconds to fix the tiny magnetic strip to one end of the Band-Aid, to reach up and stick it behind the cistern with the other adhesive end. He flushed, unlocked the door and went out. He showed no curiosity about the others in the bar, made no attempt to imagine which of them would retrieve the strip. He crossed back over the road just as they finished wiping his car dry. It had certainly

been easy enough. His watch was already set for the date of the next drop. This made it easy for him to put all memory of this from his mind, to think instead about the Epsilon field.

During the next week, they worked hard and managed to increase the duration of the field's existence by a factor of ten. Prof. Bhattacharya dropped his bombshell at the weekly report meeting.

"You gentlemen, and lady of course, will I am sure be most interested in a theory about the Epsilon field that Dr. Levy has developed. We have had discussions of an exhaustive and continuous nature and the time has arrived to present you with some of our tentative conclusions. Dr. Levy."

For a change — and a relief — Levy's pipe was not working but lay instead reeking at his elbow. He shook a cautionary finger at Bhattacharya. "In all fairness, I must speak the truth about this discovery. Yes, I did the hack work on the computer to see if the math supported the supposition. But, no, I did not originate the idea. Our illustrious chairman did and all credit where credit is due. Now as to the theory . . ." He took a deep breath and reached for his pipe — pulling his hand back when Bhattacharya coughed politely. By common consent he had been requested, ordered rather, not to ignite the foul object at these meetings. His fingers twitched and he sighed.

"Now nobody laugh. To put it as simply as I can — the silvery surface that we have been observing is . . . the interface between our plane of existence and another. Or between our dimensions and a space of different dimensions. Or between here and there — only we don't know yet where there is. But we do have an idea how we can find out." There was an expectant silence and he went on.

"We have to construct a second field. In the relationship between the two fields we will find our explanation of this phenomenon."

This was not the end, or even the beginning of the end, of the research. But it was the first step along the road to a fuller understanding of the Epsilon phenomenon. While they pursued this line of research, Adam saw to it that he had his car washed every Friday, had his single beer at the same time — and had the opportunity to put three more Band-Aids into place, one month apart. Each time that this had been done, he put the matter from his mind until the next time the alarm buzzed. He was as engrossed in the work as anyone else, just as excited as they all were when Bhattacharya elected to sum up what they had discovered and proposed a tentative explanation.

"You have all heard, and appreciated as I have, Dr. Levy's definition and description of Epsilon space. I hope he will excuse me if I attempt to rephrase his excellent work with strictly non-mathematical terms.

"There is another space behind the shining surface, lying in some relationship to our own three-dimensional space. At the present time we do not know the physical dimensions of this other space that we shall call Epsilon space, other than that they cannot be measured in any way by the instruments and techniques that we know. It may be infinitely bigger — or infi-

nely smaller — or may have no size at all from our point of view. Let us assume this last, for we have seen that if a particle of matter is passed through one screen it will emerge from the other in what appears to be no measurable time at all. We have separated the screens by fifty meters and are still unable to measure any time interval. So let us again assume, for the sake of argument, that there is no measurable time difference in this newly discovered universe. It follows then — and you will permit me this fantastic assumption — that if one screen were here and the other in India, something entering one screen would emerge from the other at the same instant. If this be true, then the impact of this discovery will certainly change everything — and I am not given to hyperbole, as I am sure you all know. This discovery will change everything to do with transportation in our world. Which in turn will change every aspect of the world as we know it. I feel that we have a momentous discovery on our hands."

Levy started to speak — then was struck as silent as the rest. For at that moment they all shared the same vision of humanity and the future. Gone the highways and trains from the face of the Earth, gone the great airliners from the skies, the ships from the sea. All of them gone — replaced by the simple and ubiquitous screens. Step through a screen and you were one step from anywhere else on the planet. The concept was too immense, too staggering to assimilate all at once.

There would be technical problems, of course — but the history of mankind's technology had always been the history of refining and improving upon every invention. From the Wright Brothers to Concorde, from sailing ships to atomic-powered carriers. The technical problems would be surmounted.

But what kind of a world would it be when all of the problems had been solved?

"I feel a great fear," Levy said. "I see us on the shore of unknown — and deadly — seas, and I wish that we could turn back and not begin this voyage into the darkness. But I know that we cannot. But at least we can keep this discovery to ourselves for as long as is needed to do the required research and development in secrecy, keep it from the men of war for as long as we can. Keep it from those countries that will see it as a weapon, not an economic blessing."

He continued, and others spoke as well, but Adam Ward did not hear them. His thoughts were far away from this place, in a distant country, his native country. Not as rich as this one, with a different system of government. But still his country. He had never been much of a political thinker. Happy only that his masters permitted him to do the work he enjoyed. Happy now, despite all of the difficulties, that they had sent him on this mission. To have been here at this time, to have actually taken part in this work — it was like having been present at the invention of the wheel.

He looked at his watch. Two days to go until the next car wash and beer. It

was not his regular Friday to communicate, but he had been told that a message could be left in an emergency. The code was a simple one to indicate that he had left a message. Instead of his usual miserly fifteen-cent tip, he was to leave a dollar bill on the bar.

On Thursday night he stopped at the delicatessen next to his apartment house and bought two sandwiches and a cold six-pack of beer. He had a long evening's work ahead of him and no time for cooking or a restaurant. When he entered the apartment, he locked the door carefully behind him and turned on the portable radio as he always did. He carried this with him to the bedroom when he changed his shoes for his slippers, and even took it with him to the kitchen when he opened a beer and put the remaining bottles into the refrigerator. He had built the detector into the radio himself, had tested it often, and knew that it was reliable. The apartment had not been bugged in his absence. He had been ordered to take this precaution and did so automatically. His attention was upon the report he had to make and on how to compose it so that it would be both detailed and still short. It would be too complex to enter directly, a character at a time, into the hand calculator. He took out his typewriter and slowly and meticulously typed out his notes. It was after nine before he was done, past midnight before he had encoded it all to his satisfaction. After this his neck hurt and he was tired — but he had been trained well. In a large stone ashtray he burned the sheets of paper with his notes and draft — along with the used length of ribbon from the typewriter. He pounded the reluctant black mess into dust with a ladle from the kitchen and did not retire until the last fragment had been flushed down the toilet. The work was done and he was satisfied.

He was usually able to put this clandestine part of his life from his mind while he worked, but not this Friday. Up until this moment it had all been part of a game to him. A complex and possibly dangerous game, but one without the importance of the real work that they were doing in the laboratory. But now this had all changed. The armed soldiers at the entrance to the lab, the manifold examinations of his pass, all held a different significance now. They were there to prevent precisely what he was doing. He felt what — pride? — in what he was accomplishing. Perhaps. But he was doing only what he had been trained to do. And until the report had been left, his work was not at an end. When five o'clock came, he tried not to hurry as he put on his coat and went out to the car.

There must have been an accident somewhere ahead; he could hear the sirens in the distance, while the normally heavy Friday traffic was now stopped dead. He crawled along with the others for five blocks before he could extricate the car and work his way around the jam. The car wash closed at six. If he was late, it would be another week before the drop could be made. The thought of waiting for that long was frightening, and his hands were damp on the steering wheel as he fought his way through the crawling traffic. He need not have worried. It was a quarter to six when he

pulled into the drive by the pumps, returning the smile of the black man at the till.

"Almost didn't make it," the man said, ringing up the sale. "The wife give you Hell with a dirty car for the weekend." Adam Ward nodded and paid, then waited for the light before he crossed the road. They were getting to know him here, as well, and Mom nodded her well-dyed head and put his beer on the bar before him. He sipped it quickly, suddenly eager to have this matter done with. As he turned to the toilet, one of the other customers shuffled in ahead of him and locked the door.

"Sure beat you that time," Mom cackled. "Another beer — so you'll really have something to work with?"

He started to say no — then nodded. A second beer might help explain his sudden generosity with the dollar tip.

When he heard the gurgle of the ancient plumbing, he gulped the last of the beer, trying not to cough when he did so, and was standing outside when the door rattled open.

"We're just middlemen, Sonny," the old man said, glaring as he emerged from the toilet, and for one heart-stopping moment Adam thought that he had been discovered. But it was the classic remark. "Goes in one end and then out the other."

Door locked behind him and tested. Good. Two lengths of magnetic tape this time; there was a lot to report. On tiptoe he reached up and slipped the Band-Aid into place — and experienced a feeling of intense relief. It was done. His part was finished. Others would process the information he had obtained. Relief, and two beers, gave him good excuse to use the facilities. To flush, to wash his hands in the grimy sink, to dry them on his handkerchief, then unlock the door. Two grim-faced men stood waiting for him outside.

"You are under arrest," the first man said, showing him a gold badge of some sort. "Just don't make any fuss and you won't get hurt."

Adam was too startled, too numb to react. He let them click the cold handcuffs to each wrist, pull him firmly towards the front door. There was one glimpse of Mom's hanging jaw, then he was outside and being hustled towards the open door of the waiting limousine. He held back — but was pulled inexorably forward.

"My car," he said. "It's being washed . . ." But when he looked up, he saw that a stranger was driving it into the street. His captors said nothing, just pulled him forward and into the back seat. After that a numbness and despair overcame him as they sat in silence during the drive. It was over. All over.

The interrogation took place as soon as they were inside the Federal Building. His two captors pushed him into a chair at the large conference table, then sat one to each side of him. They did not remove the handcuffs, perhaps to keep him in mind of his perilous position. A tall man, obviously

senior to them, entered and pulled up a chair on the other side of the table, then reached out and turned on the tape recorder.

"What is your name?"

"Adam Ward. What do you think you are doing —"

"Answer my questions correctly and don't act stupid. Whoever you are, whatever your name is, we have been watching you since you came here. Who are you — and where is the real Adam Ward?"

"This is preposterous — I want a lawyer. . . ."

He went silent as his interrogator slid across very clear photographs of the magnetic hits of tape attached to their Band-Aids.

"You will talk and you will tell us everything. Now begin."

Adam took a deep breath and let it out with a tremulous sigh. It was over. There was some relief in that. "Take these cuffs off and I'll answer your questions. Isn't that what they call a fair cop in the cinema? In a way I'm glad it's over. I've done what I had to do. What has been discovered here belongs to all mankind — is not just the property of one country. If I have done that, why then I have done something important."

"You've done nothing — except probably get yourself shot," the interrogator said with malice-filled satisfaction "We've monitored all your drops and know all of the people involved. They'll be picked up tonight. It's all over and you have lost."

"Really," he said, irritated at the man's superior tones, then looked at his watch. "I wouldn't be so sure if I were you. The tapes were just backup. The typed originals are well on their way by now."

The sudden pain drove him to the table, gasping. Then the fist struck his face again, even harder. "Tell us what you mean — tell us!" The pain again. He had meant to keep this secret until there was time for the contact to be long gone. He had not counted on the pain. He had to speak. It was almost seven. The papers would surely be safe by now.

"What papers?" the interrogator asked. He must have spoken the word aloud, although had no memory of doing so.

"The notes I typed," he said through puffed lips. "I always typed the report out before encoding it. Then I left the sheets under the mat in the car when I brought it into the car wash. Each time when the car was returned, the sheets were gone."

There was a silence and he sat up, shaking. But he had them, he could tell by the grim expressions on their faces. They had not known about the car wash.

"You are out of your mind, you commie hastard," the man who had struck him shouted. "Every guy in that car wash is black. You Russkies are good — but not that good. You don't have any black Russians yet."

"I beg your pardon," Adam said, speaking slowly through his bloodied lips. "Of course those chaps are black. Mostly from the West Indies. Good agents. And I resent the suggestion that I am Russian. I'm Canadian,

Oxford graduate, Rutherford Laboratories. I believe my recruiters were MIS. British, you know."

Even though it hurt, he found himself smiling at their shocked faces. "Nice of you to share your technical advances with your allies. Greatly appreciated."

## THE SEVEN AGES OF WOMAN

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players:  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
One woman in her time plays many parts,  
Her acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,  
Mewling and puking in an attic room.  
And then the giggling schoolgirl, with her satchel,  
And shining morning face, draping crepe  
Paper in the gym. And then beloved,  
The universal ingenue, the beheld  
Of all beholders. A career girl then,  
Hair panther-black and claws for fingernails,  
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Drinking the champagne reputation  
From the bottle's dribbling lips. Then the grande dame,  
She of commanding bosom with white laces veil'd,  
Charged with the casting of a dozen roles,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so she plays her part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the fat and slipper'd dowager,  
Her glasses worn en collier, a shopping bag  
In either hand, brimming with the produce  
Of six continents; and her now manly voice,  
Tuned to the reedy whisper of those grown hoarse  
From having laughed at death. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is Alzheimer's disease, and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

— Tom Disch & William Shakespeare

The Seven Ages of Woman 75



**PROJECTILE WEAPONS  
AND WILD ALIEN WATER**  
by Rebecca Brown  
art: Hank Jankus





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AND WILD ALIEN WATER**

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*Some science-fiction stories are self-contained; others are set in a universe whose history and possibilities continue to unfold: and so with the present story, Rebecca Brown's first story sale. "When all else pales, try doing what you really want to do," she has said — and we have no doubts as to what that is.*

*She is otherwise a dropout from a Doctor of Arts program, living in Charlotte NC and working part-time at a radio station.*

His green Coeshee cloak hanging limply around him in Earth's gravity, the young alien, Chastain, leaned back in his library chair so his basketwoven spine — the curved processes of bone and cartilage — took the gravity instead of his long delicate legs. *Accelerating into the UCad Library System*, he thought, no, *this rugging always is gravity*, as he worked the keyboard with travel-stiffened toes.

After several false name-character combinations, he found out how the library listed Onosaki and called up his thousand-year-old digital — *humans must be fascinated by their guns as I am*, Chastain thought as he began to watch again, in a clearer copy, the Gunmaster movie once caught by Coeshee receivers in space. All through space, he'd dreamed of Earth, its wildness.

The Zen gunmaster, just as Chastain remembered, stood on an Okinawan beach, with wild water crying for him — the man with eyelids bent in the corners. . . .

Sar, the senior male in the Coeshee exchange group, had told Chastain many times that the digital was fiction, but when Chastain left the Coeshee transport, dazzled by Earth's sunlight, he'd bumped into a human with a gun. Fictions, Chastain decided, weren't utterly spun from nothing. Now, he sped the movie up to the end. The Gunmaster on the screen raised a black iron weapon. Again, the electric robots cut him down with lasers. Chastain's circulation system went into acceleration mode as he watched the blood, red as his own, pump out of the man.

And, on the screen, water jumped madly.

Suddenly, Chastain wanted to see that ocean — uncontained water stretched from Asia to California, oxidized stars, glittering with smelly sodium chloride like planet sweat. His button nose, rough as a dog's, quivered.

Earth wasn't like a giant hollow Coeshee home structure with its meticulously balanced ecology — it was a wild place, with gangsters. Chastain was sure of that. And he could do things on a planet he'd die doing at home.

Bending his long alien fingers in the gun gesture he'd seen on other Earth digitals, Chastain pursed his stiff thin lips and went "pow!" Then he called

up a transportation map and dressed in human clothes, with his feet locked in walking shoes with pads, damp and sticky, under his toe arches.

Since his huge eyes were too sensitive to stand direct sunlight, Chastain dabbed flesh glue between his eyes and behind his ears so his glasses (which got dark when too much light hit them) would stay up. Contacts, which he would have preferred, made his eyes itch.

Feeling sticky, glue between his eyes, feet sweating in walking shoes, Chastain looked at his reflection in a mirror and tried to twist his lips into a human smile. His whiskers, like a seal's, bobbed instead.

Then Chastain went out and stared at the clouds — glowing from several hundred square miles of tower lights, furry — his own huge black universe invisible beyond them. *Humans live in an absolute accident, wild air, wild rocks. Why are they so carefree about it?*

Sar came back from the library earlier than Chastain, thinking about the Aztecs, wondering what the humans would think of his reading — he knew, despite the assurances that Coeshee privacy would be respected, that humans tracked his every move. He switched on the sleeping room light and saw the two water beds filled with other Coeshees, all except for Chastain. *If the Spanish accounts were true, then the Aztecs were insane monsters who deserved to be conquered; but humans are so odd, so horrible.* He always wondered if humans helped with the Coeshee plagues to show Coeshee what terrible biological powers the humans, otherwise primitive, could have.

*If I could find out, in their biological labs, what they might be preparing for Coeshee,* Sar thought as he took off the human clothes he'd worn to the library. He felt as though the humans teased him — this room so obviously full of surveillance equipment — so obvious he didn't need to open his kit to check — but his Population Control Officer's instincts tugged at him — *they're teasing you* — as though they were more teasing than the simple ones. He took off his Coeshee briefs and went into the little recycling and cleaning room.

Bending over the recycling pot, he noticed a grid of electric-eye beams just above the water and grew very angry, then very cold. *Like lab animals . . . That's why none of us were invited to Thomas Leech's party. The project director doesn't celebrate his grant in the company of his lab animals.*

Sar went back to his kit and painted the one-way mirrors with opaquing screen. Then he took out the small sensitive meters and found every microphone and rewired each one to play Coeshee breathing, his own heavy breathing now as he struggled through the gravity, climbing up into each room corner.

Then he went back into the cleaning and recycling room and shoved his fist a few times through the toilet's electric-eye beams before he ripped the entire apparatus out. Then, in the privacy the humans had promised, he

stepped into the shower and washed all over. Carefully, Sar cleaned his genitals and then, satisfied that the humans couldn't complain of the musk, retracted his penis into its sheath again. He turned off the water and plugged his hair drier into the adaptor the humans gave him. *Perhaps they have a device in that*, he thought, but he was too tired to do more than dry his body and head hair, keeping the hot air away from his sensitive whiskers. Then he put on fresh briefs and went to wiggle into the Coeshee piled in the water bed. *I've got to keep my ears open for a morning wake-up call — our sleep habits are so disturbed*, he thought just as he was about to close his ears.

When the phone rang, Sar heard a bell in the middle of his dream about the asteroid mining, when he broke his arm. The bell insisted — he started up — disoriented, wondering why they still accelerated. Then he recognized the tugging — gravity. Looking around, he saw the phone and wondered if he'd set off alarms when he disconnected the monitors that made him feel like a lab animal. He moved gently off the bed so he wouldn't disturb the other Coeshee and answered the phone. The human clock showed a strange hour — too early, Sar thought, for the wake call. Alarms.

As soon as Sar recognized the voice asking his name, he went right in. "We were told that we would be an exchange team, not laboratory experimental animals. So I disconnected your equipment and screened the one-way mirrors, realizing that some mistake had been made."

"Is that what being a Population Control Officer means, to disconnect the equipment we need for our studies? We study humans like we had hoped to study Coeshee, to make for better understanding among our people." Sar could hear Leech sigh with frustration. "But I didn't call about that," Leech continued. "Chastain left the campus about 3:30 after checking BART — that's our tube transport system — routes."

Sar decided humans became weirder each time he'd met them and asked, "What can happen to him in your dark?" Humans acted superior because they'd helped the Coeshee. That biological information only arrived 200 years after the worst of the plague. By that time, Coeshee immune systems were adapting, but the humans gave them something new to worry about — humans. The human bio data allowed some near-light-speed travelers to come back despite unadapted immune systems. *But now, we're supposed to share life space with them.*

"I thought you needed to keep track of your people here," Leech said.

"Dismantling all your mis-placed lab animal equipment was very tiring. I prefer to sleep. If trouble, let me know. Is your planet more dangerous than our home structures?"

Sar suspected the humans had not tamed all of their kind, but then Chastain knew how to handle himself with predators.

The humans had warned the Coeshee that the B tube transports were

more dangerous than the A trains — more thieves — so Chastain bought a B card and went down into the station. The BART station made Chastain feel at home, humming electric coils for moving trains, contained air (but too thick, always too thick with useless nitrogen), good light — no monster blue glow-tube skies. He twitched his whiskers, leaned back against a pillar, and watched. Just like any tube transport the train pulled into the station . . . and sank, unlike Coeshee tube trains, on the coasting rails just before the doors opened. Chastain hopped in, the train doors hissed shut, and he worried for a minute about acceleration on top of gravity. The train gave a little hop. *They have to lift it all the time against gravity*, Chastain thought, marveling at how much more electricity these human trains would use. The forward speed increased smoothly, so Chastain pushed his bristles forward and looked around.

Most of the females painted their lips in sexual-arousal imitation — Chastain wondered how the males stood it, then snuffed and realized the females and most of the males masked their pheromones. “God,” he heard a female say, “he isn’t much bigger than a man — taller but skinny — but he’s got plum-sized eyes. Look, he just wiggled his beard stubs like a car.”

He wagged his chin at her — her own eyes became larger. “Where’s somebody with him?” she asked her male companion.

“They understand Amerish,” the woman’s male said.

“Yes,” Chastain agreed. Then he closed his ears, the muscles falling with a moist clink in all the gravity, to avoid hearing more human jabber, but he kept staring around at all the rubbery faces which looked so exotic in a tube transport that could have been in a home structure. Humans bent face muscles to send out mood signs — Chastain was fascinated but still slightly queasy.

Then a trio of human adolescents, a female and two males, padded into the car, moving like digital outlaws. Chastain liked them instantly. They held their faces rigid and they made all the other passengers very uneasy, just as he’d made humans uneasy. Chastain snuffed, smelled human anxiety swear, so he opened his ears. They terrorized the other passengers; he’d only made the humans uneasy.

The female wore clothes so tight her muscles showed through the shiny black fabric, and the others also wore tight black pants. Chastain looked back at the girl, with ragged black hair and strange skin, for a human: not pale, not brown. She’d painted around her eyes and wore a thick leather belt with a huge two-tongued buckle.

She stared back at him, lips twisted in a not-smile. Chastain didn’t mean to challenge her, so he dropped his eyes slightly, looked at her hands and saw she chewed her nails, like a caged beast which hires its flesh. The two males, blunt-faced, bulky creatures, stood on either side of her.

Any Coeshee, Chastain knew, as wild as these humans would die of it. Blood pounding in his head, he was not quite convinced of this situation’s

reality. They looked at the space on the bench around him, wanting to sit but uneasy. Chastain reached out a hand toward them.

"You an alien." The girl announced this flatly.

"Yes," Chastain said, wanting to be utterly melodramatic, like his digital heroes. "Thieves, you will show me your ocean. We can't hold oceans in a space colony."

The males sat down hard on either side of Chastain as the car collectively hissed in its breath. The girl sat down by the biggest one, leaned over her companion's knees, and asked, "You space monsters got coin, credit chips?"

"I don't speak much odd Amerish, just UCal Standard, some digital."

"Money, you with money? We'll take you to the ocean for coin."

Chastain pulled out his wallet pouch and showed them the little bit of human money he did have. The three looked at each other dubiously, about to leave, when a BART patrol approached. Chastain loved seeing tense men with guns — very *proto-digital*, he decided, wiggling his chin with glee. One patrolman came forward while the three others stood back.

"Alien?"

"Yes," Chastain said, happily agitated. The girl giggled.

"Papers on all four you?"

Chastain handed his wallet pouch to the officer. The humans sitting beside him pulled out various tattered IDs.

"Chastain, isn't that a human name?"

"Digital idol in your history. Shows reached us when I was a child. Took a human name to fit in better. I love humans — the wild planet life."

"Bad company for an alien guest, Chastain Coeshee. I suggest you come with us to a safer car."

"Oh, no. I have permission to travel California without a population control officer's permission." Chastain didn't want to leave his companions, so totally fascinating, and he wanted to impress them into staying with him.

"Can you dare give me an order?" he asked as thuggishly as he could.

"Your companions might be dangerous. Do you understand that?"

"They know the way to the ocean, I am sure."

"I should make you come with us. You're just a kid."

"Bad idea," Chastain hissed, coiling into a Japanese fighter position.

The girl spoke then, "Hey, patroller, we bruise the spacie, be monster interplanetary incident. There's no hired-law could get us out of cage then."

"And hiding an alien would be difficult," the patrol man pointed out. "Chastain, I suggest you see the ocean at Seal Rock — well-patrolled area, even at night. And don't pay your guides here more than \$10 each."

"Coeshee," Chastain said, "are forced by space life to be very non-violent, but extraordinary good hidiers."

Just then the train reached a transfer station, and the human girl said, "Hey, pat, we take the alien to the ocean all right. *Buen public relations.*"

The three took Chastain by his arms and led him quickly out of the car,

away from the officers.

"Population control officers?" Chastain asked.

"You got an alien law team tracking your ass moves, Chastain?" the smaller male said as he leaned against Chastain, who was happy for the touch. Chastain felt his wallet pouch being lifted, and thought a *playlift*, not so skillful. They ran down the concourse together and he bumped the male who'd lifted his wallet and took it back. Since the male didn't seem to notice, Chastain bumped him again and took his wallet, too, just for fun. *What a game to play in gravity, where all the little weights add up*, Chastain thought, hoping his toes weren't breaking from the running. He tossed the human's wallet to the girl and stopped to lean against a pillar and pant for breath.

"This gravity!"

The humans froze. "You popped in the head, spacie," the girl finally said.

The male whose wallet Chastain lifted took Chastain's arm firmly.

"Come on, spacie, we'll show you the ocean, right under . . ."

"We're wasting the night," the larger male said.

The girl held up her hand to the males. "Wait a minute. Could you lift wallets for us, like you did Ro's?"

"Yes," Chastain said. "Show me the ocean. I'll steal for you." He bumped lightly against each of the three in turn. The girl wrapped her arms around his skinny body. She was thin, too, and felt almost like another Coeshee, but smelled oily.

The girl squeezed lightly. "You'll do for us, Chastain."

Chastain was utterly touched.

"I'm Meg," the girl said, "and the guy whose wallet you lifted is Ro. The big man's Heyzus, spelled like you wants."

Finally, the train doors opened, and they tumbled into the train like rolling, playing ferrets. The girl sat down beside Chastain and carefully felt the spines in his back — high-tensile bone.

"Very protective against abrupt space acceleration," he explained, "but it isn't worth a damn in gravity." She giggled.

When the train came out of the tube and stopped, Chastain and the humans got out and walked by many twenty-story apartment towers near the ocean. As they walked, arm in arm, toward low-lying clouds, Chastain smelled salt and rot — dead plants and animals, decaying, wasting.

Suddenly, Chastain saw the ocean. His shoulder far went on end under his human clothes — and he tip-toed toward it, ready to jump back.

*How*, he wondered as they crossed the sand and stopped by the ocean's foamy edge, *could something so immense hide behind a city?*

Wild alien water rippled, collapsed, cut down by gravity. Loose gray green water slopped against his shoes as he bent to touch the foam bubbles. The ocean was a bit hideous, as though water had escaped and gone crazy, running all the way from Japan where Onosaki made the Gunmaster digital

1,000 years earlier.

*No change in the ocean, Chastain realized, or always constant change that cancels itself out.* He sensed there was a visual order to the waves, but it wasn't exact.

Finally, eyes almost in shock, he turned to his companions and noticed for the first time how grubby they were, how improbably bored. *And now I'm standing in a three-dimensional fantasy. I'm obligated to steal for them.* "You are very lucky to have such things around your city, I think," Chastain told them.

"Well," Meg said, "you kinda did the night for us."

On the way back, on a really crowded train, Chastain found that no humans would let him close enough to lift wallet pouches. But he made a handy distraction for the human thief team, so they weren't too upset.

The four sat down on a bench near the UCal Station and sorted what they'd got. Meg began to throw away the credit chips, and explained to Chastain that to get coin from them required proper biologicals, like the right live hands.

"Computer-operated?" Chastain asked. When she nodded, he said, "It's not a matter of faking the first-level code switches, but faking the okay-got-the-right-inputs, inside the computer more. I think I could help you. Computer crime is the main Coeshnee outlaw activity."

"They whack you for that, even more than what you'd get lifting in the trains," Meg said, fingering the credit chips.

"'Cause they don't catch the really good ones that often," Ro added.

"I'll do it for you," Chastain said. For a moment, he remembered how dislocated he'd felt on the beach, but then he tumbled softly against Meg and tried to hold his gaze to her — her human touch-by-look, not challenge eyes at all. Then he tumbled softly against the males and went out into the glaring Terran day. His glasses obligingly darkened.

As Chastain entered the campus, he realized how exhausted he was and decided to go to the sleep room.

Sar was waiting for him in the hall. Firmly, the senior alien gripped Chastain's elbows. "Humans," Sar said, eyes pinning Chastain, "don't really like much unescorted travel."

"Oh," Chastain said, wondering if the human population control officers on the train had reported him to Sar.

"Hard for you among their young, in your studies?"

Chastain realized Sar had heard nothing about the night and tried to twist his elbows out of Sar's hands. "Not so hard. Thomas Leech and his scholars are not typical."

"Third time I've been among humans. They've become less friendly each time. If this planet has secrets, it is not your job to discover them, or blunder into them. Tell me where you go when you leave irregularly." Sar squeezed, then dropped Chastain's elbows.

"Have you seen the ocean?" Chastain asked.

Sar asked the human who was trying to study him to take him and another Coeshee to see the ocean before he talked more to Thomas Leech. He saw the ocean — it was hideous. Then he went back to the University and up to Leech's office. Leech made him wait, and Sar knew waiting was the same for humans as it was for Coeshee — being made to wait. When Leech's assistant finally told him Leech could see him, Sar stalked in and stood over Leech, staring down at him.

"You seem upset, if I read your signals correctly," Leech said, waving Sar toward a seat.

"Chastain. His attitude toward me is bad."

"The BART patrol reported to us that he rode into the city with bad people, scutters, on the B train. We told him about the B train."

"So, your digitals are based on something real in your planet life. What do they do bad?"

Leech said, "Steal wallets."

Sar relaxed. "We do that all the time — a social-release tease. Minor — like a traffic law here, if you keep the wallet pouch. Humans hate that? Any touching you hate. You're a cold people."

Thomas Leech looked away from Sar, out his window to the bricked yards between the towers. "We aren't Coeshee. We're uneasy about you as it is. He'll give your people a bad name."

"Uneasy about us? One of your people had to steal a plague cure for us — was he a bad human, to try to help us 'aliens'?" Sar put snarling quotes around the last word.

"Wasn't that centuries ago? Really?"

"Not for me. My time flights, going almost light-speed, have folded me into the future."

"We have a species dread of other species attacking us."

"Don't be obtuse — we also have this dread. And Chastain is not a commensal predator who eats the old and crazy, thus being used to recycle . . ." *Why did this human make me want to defend Chastain?* Sar wondered, uneasily remembering Chastain's love of guns, his choice of Terran digitals. "And we have no room for random wildness in a space-colony structure."

"Yeah, and why'd he get close to tube scutters?"

"We consider humans the same as Coeshee. The first contact teams had many close friendships."

"I have a twenty-million-dollar contract to study you and your fellows. And scutters are a problem for us — uneducated thieves. I'm embarrassed by them."

"Educate them. We couldn't have such waste in our structures." Sar looked around, wishing he'd stayed in the human space station, among humans who were beginning to evolve away from their wild planet origins.

Here in Leech's office, Sar saw more typically lush human interior patterns — sprawls of textures that blurred functions, fake wild tactile things — glass plants. *To make up for their lack of touching, perhaps.* Sar stared with horrified fascination at a fake animal made of fiber, cloth, then thought, *I must get my mind back on the problem with Chastain.* "Planets are very strange."

"Your people originated on one. Life doesn't start anywhere else."

"We left planets. Our commensals eliminate our non-thinking ones. But you humans have no controls. Perhaps that's why you are so distant — you could murder each other at whim."

"I didn't take this job to cuddle up to some seven-foot spider monkey," Leech said.

They both stared at each other, then dropped eyes. Sar felt sad, embarrassed — all he wanted to know was whether humans planned to hurt Coeshee as they hurt each other in the past. He quieted himself down and said, "You, as senior human male to us, must help me with Chastain. I know nothing of wild sapients."

Leech said, "We should both discuss this when we're calmer."

Sar quivered, then agreed.

Meg, Ro, and Heyzus lifted wallets from citizens who backed off as Chastain stomped through the train, rowing his whiskers through the air and counting in Coeshee.

The BART patrol that finally surrounded the humans wouldn't have brought Chastain in, except one patrolman heard his holster snap open. He looked down — his pistol was gone. Then he saw Chastain rubbing his whiskers against the harrel, sniffing the cartridges. The little scutters being chained giggled.

As much as Chastain loved upsetting standoffish humans, he decided not to push his scene further when all the other guns came out, pointed at him. He carefully shrugged and gave the gun back to the man he took it from, holding it by the harrel like surrendering digital outlaws do. When the man grabbed him, he screeched.

BART passengers began screaming, pushing for the end doors. Meg and her friends heaved against their restraints while Chastain swung off the handholds trying to kick the officer. He misjudged the gravity and deceleration and sprawled on the floor as the train stopped. The angry officer piled on top of him.

*These are aliens!* Chastain thought as he flailed, truly panicked, while the BART patrol cuffed him, hand and foot. The man who'd almost lost his gun to Chastain reached down and ripped off Chastain's sunglasses, pulling off glue and skin. *Vicious!*

The patrol called for back-up before moving their prisoners off the train at a patrol station. Some passengers booed and threw trash, but most were

work commuters who went from hysterics to eyes riding rigidly forward.

Chastain, outraged by the human fear sweat (after they'd chained him) and rough behavior, refused to speak Amerish, cursing the patrol in Coeshee snarls. They grabbed him with their stinking hands, puffed armpit stink at him, and took his knife.

Chastain had never been without his knife in public, where the predators might be. "Protect me," he said to the patrolmen in Amerish, before he realized humans could be the predators themselves, on this planet.

"He does understand us," someone said from behind a desk. "Don't put him in a cell. You weren't even supposed to bring him in."

"He's an asshole. Stole my gun. Lucky we didn't blow his alien fat eyeballs out."

"Pinhole-eyed planet crawler," Chastain snarled back.

"Hold it, Chastain," the man behind the desk said, holding his palm flat at Chastain. Then, to the patrolman, he said, "His Berkeley people are coming for him. His alien boss says he's immature."

"Hell, immature. I say he's about sixteen. We ought to charge him."

"No," the man behind the desk said.

Chastain's whiskers relaxed, although he was still scared to be without his knife, obviously waiting for discipline. "I watch many time your patrols in the BART. Isn't your control supported by the general population?"

"You should have been taught better than to . . ." the man whose gun Chastain had held sputtered.

"Check, clean him up if he's bleeding," the man behind the desk said. "I guess he's got something like diplomatic immunity."

"By now we'd all be dead in my colony," Chastain said, calming down more. "Predators eat out-of-control quarrelers."

"Whip his ass like we do diplomats' kids." The man whose gun Chastain lifted would never be friendly, Chastain realized. He hauled Chastain to his feet and spun him around. "Hey, Jack," he cried triumphantly to the man behind the desk. "We did get him a bit. He's bleeding back of the ears."

Chastain felt behind his right ear, then smelled blood on his fingers. He shuddered. Then he realized how awful he felt. His toes felt cramped and sprained in the shoes, so when the man dropped him back on the bench, he leaned over and took them off, wiggling and snapping his toes. No stress fractures, he sighed with relief.

"Unreal," Jack behind the desk breathed. Chastain glared at him. Crazy planet people, grabbing him in a transport tube, subjecting the tube to stresses by throwing people around, braking the train suddenly. Attracting predators. No, he realized, just humans — no predators. Humans were too mean to have predators.

"You about to keep yourself quiet?" Jack asked as he came over from behind the desk. He squatted down in front of Chastain. "I'm Captain Jack Ortega. You're a long way from home, aren't you, Chastain? That trip here

must have taken you away from your people at an early age?"

Chastain shuddered and refused to talk, staring away from Ortega. *This man is more upsetting nice*, he thought. Ortega continued softly, "Tell me why you helped the scutters, Chastain."

Chastain hissed.

Ortega leaned back and pulled out a cigarette, refusing to be scared. After he lit up, he slirited his eyes at Chastain who slumped in his handcuffs on the bench. Ortega gently blew smoke at Chastain who flared his neck hair and stared rudely at Ortega.

"Look, Chastain," Ortega said calmly. "You must be someone's kid among your people to be one of the first on Earth. You wanna get in big trouble with Earth people, you run with those scutters. But don't be stupid. You'll give your species a bad reputation. Most people are nervous enough about you as it is."

"Are you nervous about me?" Chastain said, hoping Ortega would say he was. Ortega shook his head. "What's their bail, man?" Chastain said with his best digital sneer. "I'm gonna spring them outa this joint."

"Shit, a little antique alien scutter," Ortega said, standing up and walking back to his desk, with his hands in the air. The officers all laughed.

Thomas Leech had gotten a University auto and drove Sar across the bay to the BART police office. Leech, cold and hostile, led him through a maze of human buildings and corridors to a dirty room where Chastain sat in chains.

*In chains* — Sar had never seen a Coeshee in chains: medical restraints for the badly space-injured, but not in chains. He could feel his bristles jut forward and quiver, the muscles in his eyes jump. Sar felt almost as fiercely upset as fierce, but he wasn't surprised to see Chastain roll into a defensive ball.

Three BART officers had to pry Chastain's arms up to get the cuffs and leg irons off. He stayed in his defensive posture, each leg or arm snapping back against his belly as the humans released it. Sar walked up to Chastain and kicked him lightly at the base of the spine. *How you embarrass us*, he thought.

"I'm Captain Jack Ortega," a human said. "Are you the Coeshee law?" Sar looked tensely at this human, whom he'd seen laughing and walking away from Chastain when he and Leech entered.

"And are you the human population control officer? Why had no one told me of this earlier?"

"Yes," Ortega said, smiling slightly. "We were trying to handle this diplomatically, but . . ." Sar sniffed for the human fear scent — thick here, but not from this man.

"What happened?" Sar asked, hoping that perhaps he'd reached a reasonable human. He looked coldly back at Leech. "I'm a little lost on your

planet, and your academics *like* studying my lostness, counting my . . . pacing behaviors. Perhaps you, as a fellow officer, can tell me what to do with Chastain when he thinks he is a human-type thief?"

Ortega grinned and said, "He worked with scutters by distracting BART passengers while the scutters picked pockets. And we think he broke bank chip codes for them, because that bunch never had so much money before."

"I explained that you do not like these money-pouch tricks. He swore he was not doing that." *Not precisely and physically himself doing that*, Sar realized — Chastain hadn't lied. "Could someone load him in the University car?" Two officers took Chastain away, wrestling with his tightly curled body.

"Then, today, he lifted an officer's pistol when we were arresting his scutters," Ortega said. "If he wasn't an alien, the other we'd just warn him about."

"Projectile weapons? And you actually shoot these weapons?" Sar had seen digitals and worked out some of the ballistics on a Coeshee computer. They would be almost random killing machines.

"Yes; what do you use to control your population?"

"Not projectiles, without gravity to trap them. Like humans shooting in an underwater boat, a submarine." Sar looked around the patrol station, noticing all the guns. "Many wild humans?"

Ortega nodded.

"Please tell me personally if you sight him again with those people." Sar handed Ortega a card, then took it back to write his University phone's number on it. "I think you will remember when you can't read the writing who gave it to you."

Ortega nodded again, then smiled. "But we find it somewhat difficult to tell your people apart." His grin broadened, and he added, hastily, "At a distance." A human joke Sar didn't understand. Chastain was the lightest.

"Any Coeshee with scutters, call me."

"I'd like to get together with you sometime and compare notes. I've been reading about you guys all my life. Maybe we can find out new things from aliens, Coeshee. What's your major crime among your people?"

"Electronic theft. Confrontational crimes are too dangerous." Sar rose to leave, then added, "If your wild humans use much electric surveillance, I can tell you much about shutting it down."

When Sar got in Leech's auto, he looked in the back seat. Chastain curled back up again. Sar told Leech, "When we get back to Berkeley, you will arrange a soundproof room, with a call button, and no secret cameras. I do not wish to embarrass Chastain too much more." Sar looked in the rear-view mirror and tilted it so he could see Chastain. Chastain quivered.

Sar stood as close to Thomas Leech as the human would allow and looked down at Chastain curled on the soundproof room's padded floor. "I should

have asked Ortega how he would have handled this," Sar said.

"Chastain isn't human. You're free to do what you'd usually do as long as the other Coeshee tell us it was the usual punishment in your colony structures."

"This is not in the least usual. And gravity changes all the rules." Sar's voice faded and he whispered, "This planet excites him too much, I think." He sat down and took his shoes off. Nearly laying them aside, he stood, slowly, then gave Chastain a nudge with bare long toes.

Leech tensed, expecting Chastain to leap up fighting, but Chastain just pulled himself tighter. "Could you bring us beers when I finish with him?" Sar asked. He handed Leech his knife.

After the door closed, Chastain looked up at Sar and uncurled. Sar asked in Coeshee, "Why, Chastain?"

Chastain shrugged as the humans did, which infuriated Sar. He tapped Chastain again with his toes. Chastain slowly stood — the two Coeshee stared at each other. *Be tough*, Chastain thought in Amerish.

"Child, your home-leaving in childhood was not natural, but you must listen to me," Sar said, hoping to heal the social break without a beating, but calling up his own fighting experience just in case.

Chastain opened his mouth so Sar could hear the ear muscles click shut. Sar trembled, closed his own ears; then, screaming, lashed out at Chastain, thinking in Coeshee, *how this planet acceleration complicates this*.

Chastain hit Sar back, fists doubled up, which astonished Sar so much that Chastain landed several blows. *Juveniles don't attack seniors*, Sar thought as he attacked back vigorously, horrified not only that Chastain contested the discipline, but at his own anger, the pattern of his anger at humans, at Chastain, then furious that Chastain dared make him so angry.

Finally, Chastain dropped into a bruised tight coil. Sar, panting, rang for Thomas Leech.

When the human opened the door, Sar said, "Have him taken to the sleeping room." Chastain moaned a little. Leech stood dumbfounded with two beers in his hands. Sar took one as Leech called for graduate assistants to take Chastain away. They entered the room, stared at Sar, then remembered Coeshee manners and dropped their eyes before taking Chastain away.

"Is he hurt?" Leech asked.

Sar sighed and sipped the beer, then looked slantingly at Leech. The human was too nervous. He wondered if the human officer, Ortega, would be so nervous. "I doubt badly. He fought back. I simply went until he fell down. The gravity friction holding the feet made the blows harder to gauge." Sar wanted to get out of the punishment room now. "Your office? We need to discuss this, without being defensive."

*He's afraid of me, terrified now*, Sar thought as Leech briefly touched his shoulder, then flinched, as they went toward the elevator. They both got in, Leech facing rigidly forward. Sar turned his face toward the wall, slumped

against it, and felt hideously lonely, almost unable to face other Coeshee. "How can I make you believe such things as Chastain did are not things we do in our home structure?"

"Such things as Chastain did?" Leech turned and sighed as Sar looked down at the floor. When they were in Leech's office, Sar put both his hands on Leech's desk and cried. He slung his head sideways to clear the tears, but some drooled into his whiskers, trapped in the gravity, irritating his skin. Leech put a box of tissues on his desk and pushed it at Sar, who took one and wiped his face before speaking.

"You humans are brutally distant. We are not monsters."

Leech moved toward Sar, then held back, asking, "How distant?"

"Precisely like that. Do I smell bad — I wash — or do I remind you of predators? Am I so strange-fleshed and -toed that you can't come near me?"

"We don't . . ."

"Not even in the tube trains when they're crowded — always space around us. You are kinder to cats, dogs. Surely . . ."

"Listen, Sar, I don't touch other humans, not males, at least, the way we see Coeshee touch each other. But some humans touch more than do the dominant cultures on this continent."

"Then let us go there, or back to the human space-colony structure, before Chastain goes utterly mad."

Sar felt the human's fingers crawl like nervous animals onto his forearm, stop, quiver. Leech said, "We'll have a staff meeting about this."

"Not good hair?" Sar asked. He laughed horribly, a cutting imitation of a human laugh. "And tell me, now, about other problems a young digital-crazy Coeshee can get into, with your gravity and crazy un-built planet."

"Your hair feels vaguely like a rat terrier's hair. We had no idea he'd run with scuttlers."

*Leech, Sar thought, makes it sound as though Chastain has terribly poor taste. Rat-terrier hair might be an insult, probably is an insult.* "We had no idea," Sar said, mocking Leech, "that your night tubes were so dangerous even for human males with guns that they are patrolled by groups."

"Did you start your contact by telling us about the beasts you let pick off your sick and aged, predators I suspect you could eliminate if you wanted?"

"If you were Coeshee, I would ask you to also come with me to a sound-proof room. No wonder humans prey on each other — no natural predators, no balance. I saw your humans in space fight once — no discreetness or shame, wide out in the open."

"So you picked up some human fighting tricks to use on Chastain," Leech said. Sar could see him think about the \$20 million in grant credit and force himself to stroke Sar's shoulder, which bristled under his human clothes.

Sar slowed his breathing, apologized, and bumped his body slowly against Leech, saying, "Too upset for arguments tonight. Perhaps the real error is that we expect to be like members of the same species." He rubbed his

knuckles where he'd bruised them against Chastain, then added, "Thank you for the beer. We have a similar drink. Could I have my knife? I'll take the other beer to Chastain."

Leech shivered slightly as he turned the knife handle toward the skinny alien hand. Sar didn't say anything about that, but walked out stiffly, planning how he would listen in on the meeting. Then he would hide his officer's kit, wait until he could find the way to check the humans' possible war plans. *I'm letting him bother me too much*, Sar thought, *but perhaps that's what the humans want.*

Sar found it ridiculously easy to listen to Leech's meeting — he simply put a tiny microphone in the telephone and then called from his room as the meeting began. He decided not to tape it.

"Look, if I thought it would save the situation," Leech said, "I'd ask one of you to go to bed with Sar. Or Chastain. Whichever needs it the most. Sar says Chastain is going crazy because we are not really physical with them — too cold, distant."

"I get along fine with mine." Sar recognized the voice, a graduate student. "Think of them as similar to the working classes — they lean on you. It's all right. Doesn't mean they utterly love you or want sex with you. Watch them walk together — always little bumps."

Genna, Leech's assistant, said, "Coeshee or working classes walk bumping each other?"

Sar wished he hadn't done this. The Coeshees who worked with the graduate student really thought they had an honest partner. The graduate student said, "Both. That's my point. You see humans bumping down in the Barrier."

Sar heard a hiss of nylon against nylon — Genna, crossing her legs like human scissors. "Aliens as ethnics," she said. "I feel so much more relieved about Chastain now. We know his place — behind the Barrier."

The humans laughed. Sar put his teeth against his lower lip and hissed, headphone against his ear. This was worse than he'd imagined, he decided. *They underestimate Coeshee. How can they do that? We've been living in space stations for 40,000 of their years.*

When the laugh faded, Leech said, "About Chastain. I think we should get him linked with undergraduates who'd be willing to tolerate the same physical contact he got from the scutters. You see the police slide here — they're practically plastered together. Scholarship students, perhaps, would be so physical, entertain him."

"Several senators," Genna said coolly, "suggest the aliens should be studied in space, where they can be contained."

"Officially, they are here to study us, so that might be awkward. Sar suggested a more physical country, but I'd hate to see \$20 million go to Mombasa, or Djakarta."

The graduate student who got along with his aliens said, "Sar just put Chastain in the hospital, then came up and brought him a beer."

"My beer," Leech interjected. "Remember how alien they are. I'll work to contain the senatorial objections to our studies here."

"Maybe there's more wrong here than we know. I mean Sar really beat the piss out of Chastain and then seemed very upset about doing it," the grad student persisted.

"Psychotic Coeshee," Genna said. "How charming."

Sar heard the chairs being moved and realized the meeting was over. Softly, as though they might hear him, he hung the phone up, and sat dazed, sorting all the information out. *They underestimate us*, he thought again, *but that might be better than the other. But they seem so afraid of us.*

Later, Sar got the microphone out of the phone in the conference room, and dropped it under a BART train as it settled on the glide rails.

"Your stupid students couldn't keep Chastain away from the scutters," Sar said, pacing Leech as they hurried to Leech's office. "Officer Ortega called me. They tried to stop Chastain and his scutters, but they disappeared into the Barrier Flats. Ortega said his men don't patrol the Flats. You and your wild humans."

Leech unlocked his door quickly, acting as though he thought Sar would hit him at any moment. "I had no idea he'd left until you told me. Did Ortega tip the media?"

Sar felt his whiskers flare, and he stamped his feet. "I have never allowed myself to be so angry. You underestimated Chastain. This is hideous for all of us."

Genna brought in the under graduates. "We took him to the beach at night — he said he wanted to see the moon on the ocean," one said. "We lost him in the fog."

"That's not all," the other added. "He made a model gun down in the lab. He's great at tech work, tooled it right up from rough schematics."

*Agitation in public is lethal*, the old Coeshee maxim, popped into Sar's head. He stood, bristled forward, on the sides of his feet, with his hands jammed in his Earth-style pockets, trying desperately to be calm. Finally, he turned to Leech and stared him down, a full huge stare, with the yellow iris muscles quivering. Then Sar looked at the hopeless young humans. "Lost him in the fog? Can't you smell?"

"Not like you can," Thomas Leech reminded him. "Is he likely to be dangerous? This would be terrible publicity for your people."

"And it will ruin your studies of us here. If he had never left a colony structure, perhaps he would never have gone so wild." Sar was sure of that — Chastain went wild for reasons that made Sar uneasy: the planet life affected him too. He looked slantwise at the young humans, trembling little humans. "A gun, or a model, not working, of a gun?"

"It had everything," one young human breathed. "Even a little gadget to make bullets."

"Check your chemistry department to see what Chastain got from there," Sar said. Leech put his arm around Sar's shoulders, but Sar went rigid and stared at Leech again. "You can make your population control officers go into the Barrier Flats?"

"Would be use that gun?" Genna asked.

"He has been fascinated by Earth gangsters, projectile weapons, even before we left the colonies." Sar coughed. "Such powerful images you send us — wild land, wild humans."

"Will you need a gun?" Leech asked.

"The officer Ortega, who called me. He seems . . ." Sar paused, pulled his hands out of his pockets and rotated them to look at the tendons bunched up on the backs, the faint bruises from the day he'd beaten Chastain. "A human with a gun. He seems kind, concerned." Sar shook both hands vigorously and sat down firmly in Leech's office. "I'll wait while you arrange that."

"Can't you track him from where they lost him, yourself?"

"Not easy in the city. And probably too late for that."

Leech sighed and reached for his phone.

At the border of the Bolinas Preserve, the Greater Bay Urban Area stopped — abruptly — as though all sorts of glass and pastel metal towers had been shaved away to let a new wilderness of black sage and manzanita grow back. *Like nothing, except the ocean, I've ever seen before*, Chastain thought when the scutters showed it to him. He saw redwoods and eucalyptus valley groves under the spiny hills — vegetation gone wild. The only coherent structure was the tiny silver line of a tube train that crossed the Bolinas Preserve headed north.

The three human thieves lay on their bellies while Chastain crawled forward in his sunglasses through the dirt, new gun heavy in his shoulder holster, going to look at the surveillance equipment around the Preserve perimeter.

Meg whispered to Chastain, "Can you get us through the electric stuff?"

"Why can't we take the tube out?"

"They record all legal visitors. You need a permit. It's the Preserve. Lot of people so rich and mean they get themselves duplicated over and over — don't want nobody but themselves to have their money. Space returnees, real rich directors setting up the world outside by modern — real un-BART tube, real un-street. Lots of coin, rubies and other juice rocks," the girl muttered, "in simple-seeming antique houses."

"Past-worship? Like the people in our colony structures who keep giant flasks of real Coeshee soil?" Chastain asked.

"Credit-chippy past-worship."

"Yeah," Heyzus said. "Chastain, you gotta deal reason into that gun thing of yours. Shooting for stuff is real dubious. Show the gun to bully only if the clones start something. But don't fire it."

Chastain rolled to his side, took the gun out — polished like a ball-bearing — and bared his teeth, imitating a human smile.

"Boy," Heyzus continued, "thrill got to be split from business. You up-money little . . . you do for us, Chastain, and keep the digital shit out. No twists. We get you top brain buzz after."

Meg crept up and took the gun and slipped it back in the holster. "Take off your shirt, Chastain, and put it over the gun. You mess the gun up in all this dust. Especially when we tunnel."

That night they tunneled under the security barrier, bracing their hole with tubes. Chastain rigged up a randomized replay of the normal ground movements into the seismic detector. They dragged themselves and packs through before collapsing the tubes. Chastain crawled belly-down to another scanner to splice in more false read-outs.

"If they do catch us," Ro said, "they turn us over to the rest of the world's patrollers to get bone-stomped. But all the check stuff on the out rim. You rich, you don't answer to no BART patrol."

"I know about bone-stomped," Chastain said.

*But why are we crawling into this nightmare,* Chastain thought. All intelligence-shaped structures had gone, lost in the fog and brush-covered hills. *The wild zone, the wild zone* — as though cosmic rays cut patterns into jumbles. Rocks without symmetry, huge trees left to rot. *Planer life made my people desperate for mind, to escape into structures.* Humans, Chastain decided, tricked him here — these humans, the first man who was so desperate to meet the Coeshee he stole plans for gene splicers for them. Chastain remembered now that the first man who met the Coeshee had a house in Bolinas. "Bolinas — a clone with a house in Bolinas. I've heard about him."

"Yeah," Meg replied softly. "Space-timers get lots of coin for little fancy escape houses — your bank regrinds the credit for a thousand years."

"A house on wooden legs, a 150-year-old Japanese farm house always. They made me come here." Chastain shivered as the fog wisps eddied around them, nervous about his companions now, but dreading being abandoned here, in the wild land.

"Tonight," Meg said, "we'll get as far from the border and as high as we can on the mountain, then spend the day hidden."

Gravity held Chastain by his belly as he crawled with toes and fingers across the pungent brush. "Sar can track by smell."

The humans froze. Heyzus and Ro looked around, but didn't see anything. Chastain, slowly climbing through the gravity to his feet, sniffed the wind. He smelt the city in the wind and calmed down a bit. No trace of Sar — or any other Coeshee.

In the morning, Chastain watched gravity and wind play with strange orange and black insects. He found out from Heyzus that they were monarch butterflies. While millions of the insects drifted over, he held his knees tight to his chest and craved steel geodesic struts and panels to hold off the wildness. He nuzzled his pistol, feeling its hard sleekness with his whiskers, smelling the tangy gunpowder and iron. He'd made, he decided, a more beautiful gun than the pistol he'd almost stolen from the BART patrol.

The humans crawled out of their clothes and lay down in their sleeping bags as the sun rose. Chastain did the same, shading his face with his clothes.

When he woke again, Chastain felt pain from sun blisters on his arms. *The fusion source is out of control*, he thought in a panic. He opened his eyes and the mad planet jumble hurt them.

"I want to find the space clone's house," Chastain said, feeling angry and totally disoriented as he glued his glasses back on.

"If you can jack through their computer guards," Meg answered.

Later that night, Chastain's hand-sized screen flashed a small map of the space clone's area. "He collects Japanese things. Are they valuable?"

"Chastain, they see you, they get all us," Heyzus said.

"Japanese things . . . if you find the right people, if they're real good. Hard to figure — some real juice things are ugly. Better take gold stuff, real juice rocks. And get straight on what we're here to do, steal, with you jacking around the electric fences," Meg said.

"And not," said Heyzus, "for you to play digital with your homemade gun."

Chastain tried his human smile on them.

They climbed up the mesa in the dark toward the house. The four circled it at a distance and came up behind it, Chastain sniffing for dogs, for anything not human. All listened for voices and watched for lights.

A rabbit darted out from under their feet. Chastain quivered and pulled out the gun, but Meg touched him and whispered. "It was nothing."

Chastain kept the gun out.

After they reached the house, Ro and Heyzus burned a hole through the floor with a laser torch. *If clones feared thieves*, Chastain thought, *building with wood was stupid. Humans are stupid, primitive*, he decided, watching Ro hold the wood while Heyzus burnt out a circle. Ro wiggled his fingers and slowly lowered the wood disc.

Chastain climbed into the house quickly, using toes and fingers, one hand wrapped around the gun, with the three humans following him through the hole. *Fear sweat, burnt wood* — the smells excited Chastain. Some woods were jewels in the station. His gun hand trembled.

From the front of the house, a male human called, "We know you are in the house and outnumber us. Just take the jewel box in the bedroom and

we'll give you twenty minutes lead time before we call in the report."

Chastain began stalking the voice, so familiar from the historical reels. Meg tried to get the gun away from Chastain, but she stepped back when he shifted the barrel toward her. Chastain pushed by her and kept creeping up toward the man — made from the first human who'd touched a Coeshee. Had the humans or they begun the centuries of radio contact which led to the first meeting? Some Coeshee thought it was the humans; others disagreed. Chastain decided humans forced their radio into the Coeshee structures — humans brought him here.

The man and woman stood in the middle of the room, the man forward, poised on the balls of his feet. Chastain stopped, legs spread, gun pointed at them, barrel wagging irregularly from one to the other. At that instant, Chastain didn't know what he believed, then he thought his mind cleared again.

The man looked at his altar niche with the holograms of the first human/Coeshee meeting, then back at the young Coeshee gunman standing in front of him. Chastain lowered the gun to his waist, still pointing it forward, and moved the safety lever off, chambered a round and raised the gun back level with his eyes. The man said softly, "Small universe."

Chastain aimed at the man. The woman moved slightly, but the man signaled her with a very tiny hand gesture and asked Chastain, calmly, "Did my ancestor make a mistake then?"

Chastain's whiskers flattened against his head. The woman wet her lips and looked at the humans coming up behind Chastain.

"Can you speak English?" the man continued. In almost incomprehensible Coeshee, he added, "*We friends.*"

"I'm a thief," Chastain said in Amerish.

"And you've brought scutters along. Why me? What has been happening out there to alien/human relations?" The man laughed dryly.

"No, you are the aliens. Your planet makes me wild. Attacks me with crazy rocks, gravity, digital dreams."

"Could the humans say something?" the man asked.

"Pretend this never happened. Didn't know how nuts he was," Meg said, glancing briefly at carved stones in the altar niche, the cups on the low pine table.

"Does he know how to use the gun?" the man asked.

"Stop!" Chastain cried.

"He made it," Meg replied.

Chastain wondered if he was really doing this thing. He said, "Your planet is just a dream, a hard dream." His gun hand sagged.

The man nodded when the woman looked down at her fingers. Before the thieves could react, she leaped away from them, slashing through the paper and lath partitions, tearing the shoji screen, and dodged away into the night.

Chastain spun, fired wildly at her as she escaped, then turned to the tor-

menting man, took aim as best as he could with his hands trembling, and shot, wounding the man in the forearm, knocking him down. While Chastain held the gun on the man, the human thieves bolted. The man sobbed and caught his breath.

"Strange," Chastain said panting.

The man slowly sat upon the floor, holding his wounded arm tightly. Chastain fidgeted, wanting for obscure reasons to see the man act more hurt, to plead. But the man said, "You might be crazy." He spoke very slowly. "Without a frame of reference?"

"I have a gun," Chastain said. Gunpowder stench burnt in Chastain's nostrils. Stunned that a shot man could still talk so calmly, he backed out of the room, staring at the human as though the wounded man was very dangerous.

When he got to the hole in the floor, he called the humans. The gunpowder stench kept him from tracking them — and they wouldn't answer.

Chastain heard helicopter blades cutting the air in the distance and ran. When he got back up the mountain, all that the humans had left him was his sleeping bag. He dug his second box of bullets out of it, pulled the magazine out of the handle, and put new bullets in for the ones he'd shot. Then he crawled up against a rock and quivered, pressing his chin against the gun handle.

Nervously, Sar approached the wounded man in the hospital bed, knowing Chastain shot him — knowing the man's ancestor had tried to help the Coeshee. Bending deeply, trying not to scare the man more, Sar touched the man's hand with his forehead. *It would be terrible if this one flinched. Other humans were willing to let us die.* Sar forgave the ancestor his compulsion to physically meet Coeshee as the man nodded. Sar knelt on the floor with lowered eyes and said, "I am Sar, a Coeshee population control officer. I knew those who touched your ancestor. Chastain has been very evil. I am terribly sorry."

The man sighed and turned Sar's chin up with his uninjured hand. "So some are good, some crazy — like us. He seemed insane to me."

"Can he control his gun?"

The man looked ruefully at his bandaged arm. "Control as in aim? If he meant only to hit my arm, then well. Control — the gun seemed to control him. You'll say he's an aberration then? You're not all gun nuts?"

"Yes, he's out of pattern, not Coeshee. But this planet life makes our rules loose in our heads. I will insist now that the others, other Coeshee, stay in structures — it is the wildness of all your life here."

Leech came in, with a portable phone. "Sar, Ortega's on the line again."

Sar spoke his name and listened to Ortega. Then he turned to the clone man and asked, "Did he have three humans with him when he invaded your home?"

"Yes. A woman and two men."

"The BART patrol picked them up. They abandoned Chastain in the Preserve. Mr. Leech, you can take me to the Station House."

When Sar and Leech arrived, Ortega was leaning back in a chair, watching the three scutters. Sar smelt fear, which intensified when he came in. *Dirty, uneducated, scared — wild humans*, he thought.

"No more bond for you guys," Ortega said.

"We never told him to craft a shooter," Meg said.

"He made us. Forced us with the gun. We were gonna tell you where to find him," Ro said.

"We had a terrible time getting out of the Preserve," Heyzus added.

"Where, then, is he?" Ortega asked.

"We dumped him when he weirded out with the shooter," Meg replied.

"We know that," Ortega said. "In the Preserve. But . . . where, in the Preserve. Deal down time. Where'd you hide the first day?"

"We trying to cooperate, patroller," Heyzus said.

"Cage lock could rust on you. Breaking and entering, first into the Preserve, then into a house. Accessories to shooting."

"Chastain made us, with the shooter. He had the shooter, weird . . ." Meg stopped talking and glared at Sar, who smelt great fear despite the face gesture. "His pat, who beat him up?"

"She asked if you were a legal force over Chastain?" Ortega translated with a smile.

"Yes," Sar answered, hearing for the first time how alien his voice sounded.

"Your boy's gone crazy. You drove him crazy. Bet you're all crazy."

Sar's whiskers jerked up, back. "Mr. Ortega, we must find him fast. Being alone, abandoned, is bad for any Coeshee."

"Where?" Ortega asked Meg, "or would you rather talk to this alien pat?" Ortega pushed the girl against Sar.

Her muscles jerked when she touched Sar, who realized Chastain must have seemed very insane. *Must we be monsters to them, they to us?* Sar reached to touch her gently.

As the girl cringed away from Sar, Ortega continued, "It's not like puffing the pats on a friend, not like that. You tell us — none of your fellow scutters will mind a bit. Chastain spoils hunting on the Outside Line, in the Preserve, now, doesn't he? Isn't he more video than real, like a rich dump kid running with you for brain twist?" Ortega winked at Sar who realized this was an interrogation game. He wiggled his chin back and tried to sound threatening — the opinion of these didn't matter.

"You will tell us. Or I will have to talk to you alone. In a soundproof room. Did Chastain tell you about the soundproof room?" Sar thought a second about beating many humans up, one after another, and trembled.

"Up on Tam," Meg said hastily. "On the east side."

Sar brushed her head thankfully with the side of his hand, wondering why

humans varied so wildly. She flinched. "Not trying, now, to scare you, but thanking you," Sar said, trying to make his voice sound more human. She blew her cheeks out and sweated more fear stench. "Where," Sar asked more gently, looking at Ortega slantwise, "on a map?"

Ortega granted with satisfaction and pulled a topographic print-out. The girl sullenly pointed. Sar took her chin and shook it gently. "Be pleased," he told her. Then Ortega motioned for the officers to take the scutters away.

Sar looked at Ortega and said, "Strange to be an object of terror."

"Not all of us are like that. Some of us are really curious about you." Ortega put his arm around Sar's chest and squeezed. "We've got a job to do. I heard you can scent-track. Shall we get ready to search?"

"Yes," Sar said. As they waited for the search jeeps to be loaded, Sar and Ortega walked around the police facility, which seemed more complicated to Sar than need be to control sentients. "You want to be issued a pistol, or are you armed, Sar?" Ortega asked.

"I should see how to shoot one," Sar replied, wiping sweat from his hands. His feet were sore: the prospect of walking across hills and broken rock — the Preserve as Ortega described it — appalled him.

When Ortega took him down to the shooting practice area, Sar felt all the humans watch. *So odd, their expressions. They wonder about me, my own control of a gun.*

Ortega explained the gun to him. "This is a .357 Magnum — very old design, but we'd rather not have something out that could get stolen in the field that we couldn't trace. Someone steals this, we can trace the bullets. If they've got the gun, we've got them."

Sar took the heavy metal lump, machined to hold fire, thinking, *yes, there is a fascination. I feel like I'm taking my own sanity into my hands.*

Ortega put ear protectors on Sar as best he could, then signaled him to shoot. Sar lifted the gun and sighted down the barrel at the small patch on the target alley wall.

*Tremendous power! Head echoing, nose blocked by the smell,* Sar, as though half in a digital, watched his hands lower the gun. Then, defying gravity, he raised his gun, closed his ears, fired again and again, until the cartridges were spent. *Yes, we could defend ourselves against humans.* Then he shook the tensions out of his muscles and handed the pistol to Ortega. "I have never shot before," Sar said quietly.

"You did great for a first-time shooter," Ortega replied, clapping Sar on the back. Sar looked at all the humans — none seemed particularly afraid of him. His hands sweated profusely. Sar wiped them, then clapped Ortega back for reassurance.

"If you are used to them," he told Ortega, "then better for you to carry it. We may need to kill Chastain."

"We'll try to get him with a sedative dart, or an electric stunner. I'll show you how that works, because you may be able to talk yourself into range."

"If he is permanently mad, he is dead with us."

Chastain spent the rest of the night staring at his gun, wishing it, the only mind-made object in the creaking night, was large enough to crawl into. He decided, as the hideous sun rose up over the chaotic landscape, that he was beyond being in the digital he'd seen — he was in the events that lay behind them — an isolated social creature. He would try to get to the tube train he'd seen in the distance earlier — *like the long extended barrel of the gun*, some random wave in his mind added.

Although he knew what he did next was from another movie, another kind of digital, he fired three shots, waited, fired three more, then re-loaded his gun and stuffed extra cartridges in his briefs' pockets before leaving where the scutters had camped with him.

"It's electric," Ortega said to Sar as they got in the jeep, "so it shouldn't interfere with your nose." Sar sniffed a few times, smelt ozone and rubber, but not too much, nodded, then climbed in to drive with Ortega through the Preserve. "Daybreak, we heard shots, signal shots."

Sar, holding the roll bar and seat braces with toes and hands, trying not to brace so hard his bones would crack as the jeep lurched across the chaparral, said, tensely, "He has more than a gun full of bullets, despite the bullets the scutters had with them."

"Two of your medics are with the back-up people. They think Chastain sounds nuts."

"No, he no longer fits the Coeshee pattern."

"We'll try to catch him without hurting him. I hope you're not upset . . . but I almost enjoy manhunts."

"I think he is not a man," Sar said, but he felt something strange rising in him, as he'd felt with the gun — chase excitement. His hands and feet sweated heavily now as his nose captured strange animal scents, the distant city and ocean tang. *Out of our past, hunting, he thought and were quarrels always thrashed out in soundproof rooms?*

The crazy landscape lurched around — mottled rocks, thorn trees, land that pitched them all around the jeep: wild land. Sar shuddered, trying to ride the jeep rhythm like a tube car, but the seat caught him randomly. The sky glowed the worst blue he'd seen yet; then Ortega turned the jeep into a fog bank and stopped to let Sar smell the air more carefully. "They think he was about here sometime in the night," Ortega said.

As Sar checked the wind direction, noticing how scents traveled in it, he visualized shooting Chastain with a .357 Magnum — cutting his muscle control to let the crazy gravity drop him. He shook his head at Ortega — no trace of Chastain here — and climbed back in the jeep. Ortega drove up the mountain.

Suddenly, Sar felt awful — Chastain dying over and over in his mind.

"Stop," he told Ortega.

"See something?" Ortega asked as he hit the brakes. Sar bent out of the jeep and vomited — huge heaves that hurt stomach muscles. Then he straightened up; Ortega handed him a tissue and the canteen. "Sar, we can get dogs to find him." The human squeezed his arm.

Sar wiped his mouth and pulled his body upright. Sighing deeply and sipping the water, he shook his head, then said, "No. Coeshes may not kill, but we are tough."

"Sar, I have to ask you a question. It may hurt. Can I ask?"

Sar almost signaled Coeshes affirmative, but remembered to nod. He grew chilled.

"Do Coeshes kill Coeshes? I don't want the diplomatic answer; I want the operational answer. I don't care if you've got magic rays that zap would-be killers. Could a Coeshes kill a Coeshes?"

Sar looked at his vomit and said, softly, "Yes."

"So, I've got to watch your back."

Sar sighed deeply and then again, tension-relieving sighs. He drank some water and handed the canteen to Ortega, who drank without wiping off the spout.

Ortega looked at him, shrugged, and tucked the canteen up under the dashboard again. As he started the jeep, he said, lightly, "Some guys get butterflies in the stomach before a raid, like you just did, throw up. It's not unusual."

"This is alien, utterly alien."

In silence, they drove into the wind, quartering across Mount Tamaipas. Sar caught a distant scent — gunpowder, a Coeshes — and tightened his hand on Ortega's thigh. "Where are the medical Coeshes?"

Ortega picked up the radio to check and looked at Sar. "Point to it, Sar."

"Has to be Chastain, the gunpowder." Sar pointed and Ortega turned the jeep toward the scent trace, sniffing the air a little himself, driving the jeep slowly through the chaparral, talking into the radio softly. "We're bringing people from Mendocino — in helicopters. They're off . . . now. They'll fly behind the Coast Range, then come in."

"Still far, in that direction," Sar said, "maybe double the distance to the mountain top."

"Let's get over the top. We might stop him. Hang on."

Sar flattened his whiskers and rolled his eyes at the human as the jeep bucked up the serpentine ridges. After skidding a few feet down a fire road, Ortega pulled the jeep back to a rolling crawl, while Sar shook himself and sniffed. "Chastain, closer, but moving. And much salt smell."

"If we drove him up to the cliff, what do you think he'd do?"

Sar didn't answer — couldn't answer.

"I mean would he jump?" Ortega drove one-handed, talking more into the radio while Sar tried to think of what Chastain might do. Then Ortega

hung the radio back on the dash and said — sadly, it seemed to Sar — “Feds say whatever you want to do with him is okay with them, and with your people. The Feds, in fact, say you have to handle it. I think they think you’re setting us up for some kind of incident. So, now, tell me what to do next, Sar.”

*Humans!* Sar knew what the Federal humans said upset Ortega. “Ortega, use Earth law on him. I don’t know how to use the capture stick, the guns.”

“Feds say they want to see if Coeshee can control their own.”

Sar felt hot and confused as the jeep crawled after Chastain’s scent. Humans preyed on humans, but they asked him to deal with Chastain, who wanted to be a predator as if the planet pulled something very old out of him — a 40,000-year-old rotten relic of a hunting passion. And it tugged Sar the same way. He touched Ortega for reassurance, and the human reached over and squeezed his shoulder. *Planet feet, always struggling against gravity, always ready to struggle.*

Below them was the Outside Line tube, sitting on curved pylons. Chastain was running for it — they both saw him, running and stumbling through the gravity. Ortega slowed the jeep even more and it rolled across the hill like a walking animal. “He hasn’t actually killed anyone,” Ortega said. “The clone probably won’t press charges if you ship him off Earth fast. They’ve got detention facilities at our Moon base — people there probably little more relaxed about Coeshee than our Earth prisoners and guards would be.”

“That tube looks so strange in this wildness.” Sar thought of himself shooting Chastain again, red blood hanging in the air — no, falling through the gravity. Chastain should be dead, but what would it do to him if he killed Chastain himself?

“I’m going to rush him before he gets to the towers — wouldn’t want him climbing up to the juice.” Ortega gunned the jeep. “Heard you just about put him in the hospital after we picked him up with scutters. I’m calling for back-ups. We need shields to approach him. Gonna drive him under the tube, out to the point.”

“We don’t control by shooting: we dominate — push into curled posture, surrender posture. He fought back. Hard.”

Chastain stopped for an instant under the tube, by one of the pylons. He gave a tremendous cry that Sar and Ortega heard, then ran on. Sar and Ortega looked at each other. They drove up to the pylon cautiously, slowly, in case Chastain had hidden behind it.

Sar could hear the helicopters even though he couldn’t see them — behind a ridge. Ortega got out of the jeep and held Sar’s shoulders for a moment, trying, Sar realized, to stop them from trembling. He hadn’t realized how much he trembled until he felt his flesh in Ortega’s hands. “Think,” Ortega said, “about how scared he is. Most of the time, in police work, it’s just shots fired to scare. Or someone freaks. Crazy people generally are terrible

shots." Ortega climbed back in the jeep, said, "We'll go up just a little before we wait for the helicopters."

Quickly, helicopters came up from behind the mountain and flew along beside the jeep, washing it with their prop blasts as the police team pushed Chastain out onto a point. He stumbled even more now.

When they had surrounded the point, Ortega stopped the jeep out of pistol range. Sar looked at the line of helicopters hovering with nets over the hills, bouncing up and down in their own turbulence, glittering like monster insects. He looked at Chastain, so tiny out there, one of his own, with all these humans after him. *So much, so many helicopters to get one Coeshee who has only hurt a human.*

An officer handed Ortega and Sar graphite shields with radios. Then Ortega asked for a stun stick, like the one Sar had practiced with at the police station. "Remember, fifteen feet's all it shoots. Try to get in closer. It tucks in here — you can stick it out the gun port."

Each shield was about six feet high, three wide, with a gun slot to the right of the head and tiny peepholes set at human-eye distance. Sar turned his around and saw white abraded scars on the outside. "Used shields? Shots just fired to scare?" he said to Ortega, fingering the scars. If he stumbled, if the shield broke, if a bullet pierced the shield through one of the abraded spots, Chastain could kill him. Sar hadn't considered that earlier — he, not Chastain, could die.

"Well, ah . . . yeah. Budget problems," Ortega replied. Sar watched to see how Ortega put his hands on the crosspieces. The shield didn't fit Coeshee body structure; the peepholes were too close together; but Sar held the shield as best he could and went forward, crouched, sidling beside Ortega, who grinned at him.

Chastain stood back from the cliff edge, stripped to his shorts and a shirt worn over his shoulders like a Coeshee cloak, gun hand lowered. As the two graphite shields came bobbing through the brush toward him, he raised his pistol slowly, utterly exhausted.

Sar looked at Chastain through the gun slit, feeling lost in this situation. Ortega braced his shield against a rock and asked Sar, "Need to glass him?" Sar brought his shield up to Ortega's and took the binoculars. Spreading the eyepieces, he saw Chastain in a circle of light, like the targets he'd shot when he tried the gun. *Transfigured, that's what the human word means.* Chastain looked as though some ocean light shone through his eyes as he looked over Sar's line of sight. Sar knew Chastain was watching the helicopters. Skin peeled on Chastain's hands and forehead, and he looked at the shield periodically, squeezing his whiskers tight and looking more terrified then. But then he would look up at the helicopters again and his eyes . . .

*This is too much attention for him,* Sar thought primly, almost jealously. "Strange," Sar whispered, handing the glasses back to Ortega. Ortega began to grin, but stopped, watching Sar's face. Then, as Ortega raised the glasses



to look at Chastain himself, Sar said, "The glasses make him naked to us."

"If he were a human boy, I'd say he'd be looking forward to surrendering now. But the helicopters don't scare him a bit, do they?"

"We've got to take him alive," Sar said.

"Yes," Ortega said.

"We can't let him crystallize all this attention with his death."

Ortega lowered the glasses and stared at Sar, who tensed though he knew the human wasn't challenging him. Ortega squeezed Sar's upper arm gently. "Feels like the same kind of muscles we've got in there," the human said as he fluttered his fingers against Sar's muscles. "Both you flesh and blood like all us."

"There is very much different — the spine, the face nerves, the genitals." Then Sar motioned for the glasses again and watched Chastain, standing wild in the crazy blowing air, in a little round screen of magnified light. "Maybe you humans can help save him?" He picked up the shield and said to Ortega, "I'll go forward, try to talk to him." Ortega took the glasses. Both officers looked at the ground, calculating, before Sar crept toward Chastain, who swung the gun toward the advancing shield.

When Sar got close enough, he said in Coeshee, "*Rejoin pattern, Chastain, and we'll send you off Earth before you truly kill, have madness ruin your mind. The human medicine may help you, too.*"

"Sar?" Chastain's voice floated to him as faint, almost as much inside

Sar's mind, as a memory voice.

"Yes, will you rejoin Coeshee?"

"Not to die like some old passive baby!" Chastain fired at the shield. Sar felt and saw impact dimples. Then the gun clicked.

"Rush him, Sar, he's out of ammo," Ortega said through the radio. Chastain bent down and pulled a frame out of the gun's handle. Sar hesitated, then pulled the stun-stick out of the shield and tried to run. The shield nearly tripped him, so he threw it aside. He heard Ortega yell, "You stupid!" as Chastain slapped the frame back into the gun handle and raised the gun.

Sar looked into the darkness, inside the gun barrel — Death — and wondered why Chastain thought any excitement was worth that. Chastain said, "They told me about the stunners," and backed away.

Sar, feeling almost hypnotized, stepped toward him.

"If I get you down," Chastain said, "they'll have to kill me."

To do this for the humans, Sar thought, moving by tiny delicate steps toward Chastain. His feet ached — the stunner was heavy. As Sar began to raise the stunner, Chastain lifted the gun and squeezed. One click, the second time a bullet explosion. Sar threw the stunner as something monstrous grabbed his shoulder. He thought he heard another gun go off.

Gravity, Sar's mind screamed as he fell, a heavy burning in his shoulder. He smelt blood and gunpowder as his hands and toes scrabbled against the dirt and brush. He closed his eyes tight and screamed — he thought he remembered seeing the top of Chastain's head come off.

"Sar," Ortega said, grabbing him and rolling him onto his back.

Sar opened his eyes, feeling a terrible weight in his shoulder, as though a whole being's mass had been wadded up and pushed into his shoulder. He looked at the blood spreading over his shoulder, then at Ortega, who helped lift him onto a stretcher. "Death?" Sar asked.

"Sar, you'll be okay," Ortega said as he arranged Sar's legs on the stretcher. As they waited for a Coeshee medic, Sar stroked Ortega and the other humans with his hands and toes. Ortega put his hand on Sar's belly and rubbed gently. Sar clutched convulsively when the medic probed the wound.

"He'll be okay, won't he?" Ortega asked.

"Yes," the medic said, easing a needle into Sar's forearm. "*You will not be killed,*" he told Sar in Coeshee. "*Lal will rebuild your shoulder bones.*" Sar knew there were no commensal predators on Earth but still felt deeply comforted.

Ortega parted his belly again. Sar looked at him and sighed, "Was I stupid?" When Ortega didn't answer, Sar wiggled his chin at the human.

"Yes," Ortega said, "you don't charge an armed anything without gun clothes or a shield."

"But I was too clumsy for your shield. Chastain?"

"Sar," Ortega said slowly, quivering beside the stretcher. Sar knew that fantastic image of Chastain's skull pieces flying through the air was true. "Chastain is dead. I shot him. He would have killed you. You were my partner. That's what I thought."

Sar looked at the Coeshee medic, then said, "Odd." *None of the others knows how to take this killing. I'm the only one who understands why Chastain wanted to die . . . center of attention . . . better Ortega than a strange human. I know Ortega didn't want to.* Sar felt his attention being cut by the drug and said, in Coeshee since his Amerish was escaping now, "Tell them to do with Chastain's body what they do with those of other, human, gun people."

The drug dropped him into unconsciousness as he was reaching to touch Ortega's face, which was wet with tears. Q

## FUTURE TRANSIT

I dream of a human race  
Not impatient to survive by grace,  
A kind of war, in wires, without result,  
A deconvertible for every cult.

The car, which then shall be extinct,  
Will not at night seem window-linked,  
But in a stream of amber lanterns  
Passengers shall travel in turns.

Think of a trolley without the wheels,  
Without the rails that catch at the heels  
Of pleasant women on silver days.  
Oh, think of ski lifts, think and gaze

How gondolas shall climb the air  
Without a hook, a wire, a care,  
Without propellers making noise,  
But like the stars, our human toys.

**SEE YOU**  
by Susan MacTabert  
art: George Barr



*"I'm not sure," the author tells us, "just where the idea for 'See You' came from, although I'd opt for a strong influence from the Pythons and the fact that I live with birds inside and outside of the apartment. Denise, my artist roommate, keeps budgies, cockatiels, and a starling rescued from Monstro the black cat downstairs."*

*This is her first professional sale.*

Seldom There wore a peaked hat, a neat bow tie, and a suit of green corduroy. He sat politely in the right corners and never came into the middles of rooms. His favorite places to visit were bookshelves full of well-read books and the rungs of chairs without people's heels hooked over them. Seldom There was a room-waiter of the first order and he could wait and wait to such perfection that no other room-waiter could hope to compete. He had medals as testimonials to some of his greatest waits and letters of regard from his fellow waiters. Oh, there was no doubt about it: Seldom There was accomplished, recognized, and, above all, prepared to begin a wait at any time.

He began his wait on Tuesday at the Lordons' beneath Michael Lordon's desk chair. On Wednesday he sat in the right corner in the kitchen next to the pantry. Thursday morning Seldom There began another day of waiting on Mrs. Lordon's laundry porch in the corner behind the best broom. Friday it was the garage, and on Saturday Seldom There moved to the playroom.

Settling himself in the right corner beneath the sun window, he felt this was to be another easy wait in a well-behaved household of well-read books and properly seated individuals until a dark, tattered shadow interrupted his sunbeam. A crow landed on the sill, cocked his head at the right corner and croaked, "See you."

Seldom There ignored him.

The crow cleared his throat and rasped, "See you. See you."

The room-waiter blandly recrossed his legs and turned his attention to the electric outlet.

"One-eyed birds can see everything." The crow squinted its single eye at Seldom There. "But a one-eyed crow can see even the dead."

The electric outlet proved intensely absorbing, so the crow hopped up and down three times and shrieked like the unholy, "See you! See you! See you!" which woke the baby napping in her playpen and brought Mrs. Lordon running.

The informer flew to a tree for cover as Mrs. Lordon carried the baby out of the room and upstairs, but he returned to the scene immediately afterwards. He hopped down from the sill, cleaned his long, sharp beak on the carpet, and then pulled a zwieback biscuit from the playpen floor. He dragged it over to Seldom's corner and pecked at it, eating the crumbs noisily and with great gusto. The mess was revolting.

"See your shoes," the crow said as Seldom There shifted his feet. "See your shiny shoes with tip-taps." He hopped on one leg and then the other. "Little dead feet go tippy-tappy."

"I'm not dead," Seldom said in his quiet right-corner voice. "Kindly do go away."

The crow quirrapped! and then laughed thickly like a tar-pit. "Hear your little voice. Not much left. Tippy-tappy and cough-cough." Holding

the remainder of the biscuit in his claw, the crow stabbed it sharply in half and then plipped one brown morsel in Seldom's lap.

"You're disturbing me," Seldom There brushed away the crumbling offer with his yellow-gloved hands.

"Fainter and fainter," said the crow. "Only brush-brush now." It landed on the sill again and fixed its one black eye on the waiter, "See you — see you," and flew off.

At three that afternoon Michael Lordon came into the playroom with a friend and plans to set up a plastic city of over three thousand molded, interchangeable pieces. The boys stepped into the room, Tracey dropped his jaws, pointed, and said, "Look at that!"

The wait was up and over. Seldom There was ruined and forced to return all regards and testimonials. He had had no alternative and went to sulk and fade in a dark forgotten corner of the city library where his cousin, Faintly, who wore violet gloves and a chestnut suit, found him out.

"No good," Faintly whispered, patting his cousin's gloved hands folded over his knees. "No, dearie, you must pull yourself together and wait. How about something small and, say, not too challenging? Something to get you back on your seat. I know just the thing." He took a resistant Seldom by the hand and dragged him from his edge of dusty cardboard box.

"Where?" Seldom blinked as they came out of the cupboard and into the library's dim night-lights.

"Perfect — just perfect." Faintly pushed him up through the book-drop.

"I've been —" long silence — "seen," Seldom said, shuddering.

"Happens. Happens in the best and happens to the worst." Faintly landed softly beside him on the walk.

"It's never been my misfortune before."

"Yours is a rare case, pet — very rare. I still say the head-waiters were too harsh."

"Oh — no. It was a consummate disgrace."

"Hah! Bet none of them — not even old Barely — ever had a one-eyed crow look at them."

"Don't mention it." Seldom looked anxiously around as they slid the shadows along the curbs.

"Just a fluke, you know." Faintly led the way, a long journey which took them nearly three hours.

"There now. What do you think?" Faintly stood with his hands on his hips as they both looked up from the tree-lined sidewalk to a brown house partially concealed by shrubbery and backed against a hill.

"I don't care much for it. It's seclusive and untidy," Seldom remarked from old habit.

"Yes, but remember, beggars can't be proud."

"What are those?" Seldom pointed out several grisly features adorning the house's exterior.

"Works of art, no doubt," Faintly said, testing the air with his finger. "It's nearly dawn. In you go. I must be off. It's perfect, dear Seldom — just right. Go on. Go on." He gave him a shove which propelled Seldom to the porch. "Good luck and good waiting," Faintly said, smiling.

"But where am I?" Seldom looked up at the big brown door.

"A slice of pie." Faintly stepped back into the shadows and waved. "I've given you a writer and no one has more empathy for waiters than they do. Take a seat, cousin," and Faintly wasn't there.

Seldom took a deep breath, dusted off his jacket and gloves and straightened his tie. This was it. If he failed here — he failed forever and that would be the end: a busy corner, midday, and thousands of seeing eyes.

"Oh —" He shivered in spite of himself and waited to slip in with the morning paper.

The man got up at dawn, brought in the paper, and went into the kitchen. Seldom There sought out the desk, sat beneath it in a corner, and waited. If things went well, he might try the chair rungs, but for the present that performance went far beyond his courage.

Coffee and a pipe came into the room with the man. No newspaper. Seldom spent the morning listening to the incessant clatter of typewriter keys, skillfully avoiding bare feet, and smelling tobacco and coffee. He found it very relaxing and waited quite well, he thought, considering the state his nerves and reputation were in. No chance of the See-You bird finding him here. He was miles and miles away. Seldom almost almost smiled but didn't quite.

After two days Seldom felt that his cousin might have been wrong — in just one thing. This writer did not seem to wait at all. He did things. At once sometimes. But that presented no flaw in Seldom's scheme. What others did never concerned him. The writer *did* and Seldom waited. In a few weeks Seldom thought he might try a less cluttered house — something daring — open — like the old days.

On the tenth night, while the writer was watching television in the bedroom, Seldom There slipped down from between a statuette and an award in a tall bookcase in the living room and was tiptoeing around a patch of moonlight which had fallen through an open window when he heard someone whisper, "Brush-brush — tippy-tappy. Little dead feet go tap tap."

The room-waiter spun around as white as a sheet, saw the crow on the window sill, shrieked, and passed right out.

"Dead away," the bird hopped up and down happily. "Toes up — shiny shoes — no more tip-tap. No more. No more. Dead away. There he goes —"

The writer came into the darkened room at a run, tripped over Seldom There, and just caught himself from going headlong into another bookshelf.

"Caw!" the crow said from the window, "Caw! Caw! Caw!"

Rubbing his bruised elbow, the writer muttered "assoverteakettle" and started slightly at the crow on his windowsill at eleven-thirty at night.

"Golly!" he said, then remembered himself, "What the Hell?" but quietly so as not to scare the bird.

"No more?" the crow cackled in medium tones.

"It's a shtick — right?" the writer said in a more normal volume as he threw back the long dark hair from his eyes and retied the sash of his robe.

"No more —!" the crow hopped once.

"Couldn't get you to get it correct, right, kiddo?"

For answer the crow cocked his head and the moonlight caught in one eye and didn't where there was none.

The writer whistled and strolled over toward the window. "It is Night's Plutonian shore," he said. "It's also my birthday —" The crow jumped down to the floor and the man put his head out the window. "Happy Birthday! Why — thank you, chums," he said loudly. "You understand that only a real shlep would send a crow to do a raven's job."

No answer, but behind him Seldom There groaned groggily as the crow ran his beak over the waiter's glass vest buttons, Pit! Pit! Pit! Pit! Pit! — Pit! Pit! Pit! Pit! Pit!

At the sound the writer hit the back of his head on the window sash.

"Ow! What the —"

The crow flapped up to the top of a bookcase and lighted on a globe of the moon.

"Cawwracck!"

"I don't believe this — any of it —" the writer said, staring up at the bird.

"See you —" the crow said.

"Oh — no," Seldom There sat up and knew this was his fate.

"So what?" the writer said. "I see you too."

"See you! See you! See you!!" it shrieked, and rasped its beak across the globe.

"The fun's over, boys," the writer said very loudly. "Come get your bird and take it back to American International before it's missed."

Seldom There held his breath and crawled slowly from the dark edge of the moonlight to a darker place between a cabinet and the corner of a wall.

"See your little feet," the crow said.

"You do anything up 'here, buster, and you'll swing from yours —" The writer went for a long-handled broom. When he came back into the room and pushed a hassock in front of the bookcase, Seldom There peered cautiously out.

The crow spied Seldom as the writer took aim. "Brush-brush," the crow said and avoided the broom by running to the far end of the bookcase.

Leaping from the hassock to the sofa's arm, the writer followed. His stamina was excellent.

"Out! Out —!" the writer demanded, and Seldom There silently cheered him on.

"Hear your little voice!" the crow shrieked and flew back to the window-

sill. "Little dead voice — fainter — fainter —"

"I'll give you ten seconds." The writer came down from the couch and brandished the broom. "And if I still hear yours it will have to be from the beyond, savvy?"

"See you." The bird stood on one leg and peered into the room.

"One — two — three —" the writer began to count.

Seldom There squeezed himself tighter into that corner than he'd ever imagined was possible.

"See you — see you?" The bird put down its foot and looked around.

"— five — six — seven —"

Seldom There shut his eyes and crossed his yellow-gloved fingers.

"See you?"


"— eight — nine — I'm warning you, blackie —"

The crow stood uncertainly on the sill with his glossy blue-green-black feathers slightly drooping.

"Ten!" and the writer swung just a fraction too late.

"Don't see you!" the crow screamed sadly and flapped off into the night.

"I'll get even!" the writer shouted outside and then slammed shut the window and locked it. "I believe in revenge," he chuckled, stood the broom up against the wall, and then went back to the TV in the bedroom.

Seldom There opened his eyes and let out a long sigh of relief. He stood up, brushed himself off, and strode confidently through the living room to the study and perched upon the rung of the writer's favorite chair. He waited to perfection for two hours but then began to wonder if there was something to doing things. 



**THE RAMSEY GRYPHON**  
by Elaine Radford  
art: Nicholas Jainschigg





**THE RAMSEY GRYPHON**  
by Elaine Radford  
art: Nicholas Jainschigg



*This is Elaine Radford's first SF story sale — though, like a number of our writers, she has done work and writing in the sciences. At one time she worked as a geophysicist for Gulf; and she is a bird-keeper, indeed the one who wrote the book on Toucans and Toucanets. Toucanets, she would have us know, are miniature toucans — what dragonets are to dragons.*

I'd driven six hundred miles on a damned fool's errand. Usually, I flew to the source of the latest hodge courtesy of the newspaper syndicate, but my doctor had threatened me with an ulcer and sentenced me to a vacation. Inconvenient nuisance, vacations. I wasn't about to let this one interfere with my work. So, muttering something vague about Cluh Med and sex-mad lawyers, I took off in my beat-up Olds for Stoney, North Carolina, where I had a lead on a rather original bit of twaddle that was making local headlines. Man up there claimed he'd caught an *Archaeopteryx*, the bird-dinosaur link that died out sometime in the late Jurassic.

My thanks for galloping off to the back of beyond was to have my host greet me with a shotgun. "You on the wrong property, lady," he growled in the harsh western North Carolina accent I remembered all too well from my childhood in these parts. "I reckon you better git in that car of yours and git goin'."

"I'm Martha Waters," I said, gratified by the way his jaw dropped as I brusquely extended my hand. "I'm the reporter who corresponded with you recently about your big discovery. You said I could come up and have a look at it."

I could tell he was ticked off by the nervous way he scratched his head. His national reporter nothing but a woman, and not even a pretty woman like one of those hip-switching actresses who play reporter on TV. He felt tricked, and well, actually, he had been: I'd signed my name M. L. Waters with the express intension of throwing him off balance. I'd found that unmasking fraud often involved a battle of nerves.

At last he took my hand and we shook awkwardly, encumbered as we were, he with his gun, I with my notepad. He told me grudgingly that supper was almost ready; we could talk over food. I nodded agreeably.

I'd hated him on sight.

As I followed him into the unpainted cabin, I heard a woman's pallid voice call out instructions to "Worsh your hands, Matthew." A small boy skittered out of the living room, presumably to obey, leaving me and Ramsey alone in a dingy little closet grimly outfitted with faded red vinyl lounge, antique rocking chair, and a decaying moose head that favored us with a glassy-eyed stare from its mounting above the fireplace. Gray stuffing oozed from its ratty ears.

Mrs. Ramsey slipped in quietly. "Vittles on," she whispered. Her eyes

darted uneasily my way without ever quite settling on my face. Not yet thirty, her skin and personality were already dulled to gray; she'd live on this mountain all her life and never tell her husband "boo." I decided that I liked her about as much as I liked him.

The kitchen was a grim place where embroidered chicks and macramé pot-holders emphasized the blotchy oyster-colored walls. A single African violet languished unenthusiastically on a window sill. Something acrid formed in my mouth as we bent our heads over our plates, Ramsey intoning grace forever, as if sheer length could convince God to bestow what He'd so clearly chosen to deny. I no longer had any appetite for this, I thought; I'd already debunked enough cute furry dreams to carry my column well into the twenty-first century. I longed to simply have a look at the damn bird and then go. But first, it seemed, I had to hear a sermon.

Ramsey preached over fried chicken, cornbread, and milk, his thundering words a disquieting accompaniment to digestion, especially for a woman with a pre-ulcerous condition. Wife and kid let him put on the show, obligingly blending in with the furniture. "... Now the Lord says through His holy prophet Moses that He created the universe and all its inhabitants in only six days, and that He looked around and saw that it was good, and so on the seventh day He rested. . . ."

"I'm familiar with the Genesis story, Mr. Ramsey," I interjected dryly, hoping against hope he'd cut the spiel short.

"Ah, you know the story." He wagged his finger at me wisely. "But tell me this. Can you honestly say, from deep down in the very pit of your soul, that you believe?"

Careful, Marty, I warned myself, or this interview might be briefer than even you could wish.

"No," I said in a soft voice. "I can't say that I do believe. But this much I promise you. I'm in the business of discovering the truth. I'm willing to look at your evidence. I'm willing to be convinced."

Ramsey's expression called me liar. But, child of Appalachia that I am, I knew I'd pressed the right button. Like it or not, on pain of death to his immortal soul, no dyed-in-the-wool born-again Christian worthy of the name could pass up the chance to witness for the Lord.

So Ramsey went on talking.

"Evidence. Well, you'll see that soon enough, Mrs. Waters. But first he advised that no one passes into the Kingdom of Heaven on the basis of evidence. Faith is the only way, sister. . . ." He went on in this vein for quite some time. At last I judged it safe to steer him back onto the topic at hand.

"Perhaps faith would be easier to maintain were it not assaulted on all sides by science."

"Science!" he exclaimed, as if the word were a foul one. "Do not the Holy Scriptures themselves tell us that secular knowledge is ignorance in the eyes of the Lord?"

I shrugged. My job as professional skeptic didn't leave much free time for reading Bible verses.

"You will be sore distressed, my sister, when you learn how grievously you've been deceived. Your science is a snare and a deception, a trap set by Satan and his mortal accomplices. Is it not said that the dinosaurs died out seventy million years ago? And that the flying monsters, the pterodactyl and pteranodon and *Archaeopteryx*, likewise perished in some unknown cataclysm at the end of the Great Age of Reptiles?"

I nodded carefully.

"Yet I say unto you that the Earth itself has not been in existence these ten thousand years. I say unto you that your greatest wisdom is your highest folly. Oh, how you have been deceived. For the evolutionists have lied. The dinosaurs are not dead. The great reptiles are not dead. *Archaeopteryx* is not dead."

"Wonder why more of us haven't clapped eyes on those suckers?" I asked a trifle sarcastically. "Especially that brontosaurus — I understand he tended to stick out in a crowd."

Ramsey smiled the infuriating smile of the Saved. "Answer me this, Mrs. Waters," he said. "I've lived all my days in these mountains without ever seeing a panther. Never seen a bobcat neither. Have you?"

I shook my head unwillingly. As both of us well knew, those animals were rare to the point of extinction east of the Mississippi.

"Yet you don't doubt their existence, do you?" He didn't wait for my reply. "Books tell you they exist and you believe. Why then do you not believe on that greatest of books, the Word of the living God?"

I couldn't answer him, not there in that time and place, not simply. He smiled thinly, seized his victory, and pressed on. "Your greatest thinkers have lied to you, Mrs. Waters. Don't you wonder why no one else is here with us today? Don't you suppose my discovery of a living specimen of a creature known only from its fossil remains might be a find worthy of investigation? Yet where are the scientists? Where are the investigators?" He waved his knife about the kitchen with Christian fervor. "I'll tell you where they are. They're at home, hiding under their beds, running scared of Joe Ramsey and his gryphon. They're afraid that my discovery will ruin them, that I will expose the Great Lie they've expounded in their satanic texts these one hundred years. For I have proof, undeniable proof, right here under the roof of my own house, that the process known as evolution is a construct and a deceit. And mine enemies are sore afraid."

I dropped my fork. "Show me. If you have such proof, then show me. I swear by all that's holy that my readers will learn the truth."

Ramsey gestured to his son, and the boy jumped from his seat. I'd never seen a child respond so quickly to parental orders.

"Matthew, bring in the demon gryphon of ages past. Show Mrs. Waters the living proof of the awesome power of the hand of the one eternal Lord."

My stomach twinged as the boy scampered away. Now neared the awful moment when I must expose the fraud.

Then Matthew returned with a creature mounted on his shoulder.

Nothing would have prepared me. I'd considered every angle, weighed every possibility — save one. The unthinkable possibility that Ramsey might be speaking the truth.

And I'd never dreamed that Archie might be beautiful. Though his beak bristled with teeth and his wings sported claws, his serene expression and tawny feathers bequeathed to him that familiar avian air of complete self-satisfaction. He stroked his own plumage for a minute, as if wishing to show off his fine body to the visitor. Then he turned to the boy and rubbed that fearsome beak ever so gently against the hairless chin of the timid child.

The scales fell from my eyes and for a moment I believed.

That moment passed. I realized I was very tired.

"You can pet him, ma'am," the boy croaked softly, blushing violently with the effort of forcing himself to speak above a whisper. "He likes it."

I stroked the peculiar back and ran my fingers down the bony tail. Matthew scratched near the spot where one supposed a bird might hide his ears. I pulled one wing out to examine the claw; Archie's forbearance astonished me almost as much as his existence. Even intelligent birds like parrots rarely tolerate such handling unless extensively trained. Yet the Ramseys had recently caught this thing in the wild. I could scarcely believe it, although I had to. They'd hardly purchased *this* at the local importer's!

At length I even ventured to open Archie's bill so that I could look at the anomalous teeth. The little bird gaped willingly as long as I could have wished. I nodded finally, letting the creature go back to cuddling Matthew. I needed a breather; I had to think. Six hundred miles of driving had reduced my brain to mashed potatoes.

"OK," I said. I looked Joe Ramsey dead in the eye. "He's for real. I'm coming back first thing tomorrow morning to get pictures and some explanations for my column. In the meantime, don't breathe a word to anyone — ANYONE — about this little guy. I'm willing to bet there's more than a few evolutionists who'd be mighty happy to see him meet with a big accident. Do you understand?"

The whole family nodded solemnly. The kid looked scared. Fine by me. I laid it on thick on purpose. This could be the story that put Martha Lynn Waters in the history books. I wasn't about to get scooped by some stringer from *Fate*.

I woke up in my room at the Stoney Sleepy Teddy with an infinitely clearer head. My mind had started clicking as soon as I'd let go of consciousness and drifted off to dream of turtles, frogs, and snakes. Spare me the Freud — I knew what the images were trying to tell me the instant I blinked open my eyes. I'd found the fallacy in Ramsey's argument.

Archie's existence didn't disprove evolution at all. The simple fact that he hadn't kicked off at the end of the Mesozoic no more screwed up the geologic time scale than did the survival of the amoeba, the turtle — or, Hell, the mammal. In the cold light of dawn, I realized I'd allowed the preacher to put my brains on hold. I wasn't covering the story of the millennium after all.

I didn't mind, to tell the truth. I wasn't that keen to wrestle with the implications of proof that the world had been created by a Creator. I grimaced as I dragged on my morning cigarette, reflecting on the fact that I never had much cared for the idea of God, not even when I was a girl growing up in what people called His country. I'd always been secretly convinced that had I been given omnipotence, I would have made a far better job of the universe.

Downstairs, sipping dirty dishwater in the coffee shop, I thumbed through a few bird books, wondering if I'd been somehow fooled. Clearly, my hours of driving had reduced me to a woolly-minded mess. Prime evidence: the fact that I'd been taken in for a second by Ramsey's specious brand of logic.

*The Avicultural Encyclopedia* alerted me to the existence of the boatzin, a fairly common South American bird whose young climb about the trees using claws attached to their wings. The text commented explicitly on the similarity in structure to Archie. And the critter was even the same size. Had that been what I'd seen, a juvenile exotic bird with bizarre tail and teeth crazy-glued into place? Damn!

Tossing a quarter on the counter, I left. There's no fool like an old fool, I told myself as I slumped into the Olds. Maybe the doctor was right about that vacation. Maybe I'd smashed one too many fuzzy-wuzzy visions. And now all the nuts were having psychic revenge as my brain did handstands straining for a reason to believe.

My thoughts did ten loops for every circle I made up that mountain to the Ramsey place. I arrived mentally dizzy, not to mention a couple of hours past "first thing in the morning."

My tardiness proved to be a boon, though. Only Matthew, faithful Archie perched on his shoulder, still waited for me. His elders had to get to the farming chores, reporter or no. I sure as Hell didn't miss the second installment of Ramsey's sermon.

"You want me to fetch Pa?" Matthew asked, his dark eyes wrinkling anxiously.

"I'd like to talk to you for a while, son." Cracking the kid was probably the key to the enigma.

His face radiated worry as he shifted uneasily from foot to foot. "Yes, ma'am," he mumbled softly.

Curiosity struck. "Aren't you afraid your bird will fly away?"

"No, ma'am. I don't think he knows how to fly."

That fit, if he were a hoatzin. Only the young have the climbing claws; the adults, who are strong enough to fly, shed the weird structures. But I had to shake my head as I looked Archie up and down once more. If he were fake, damned if I could tell. I snapped a few pictures: Matthew and Archie, Archie alone. Then I set up the recorder and flipped it on.

The interview went quickly, too quickly. The boy's vocabulary was restricted to "no, ma'am" and "yes, ma'am." Yes, ma'am, he'd caught the bird himself. No, ma'am, no one was with him. Yes, ma'am, he used a butterfly net. Yes, ma'am, he'd kept pets before; he had a pair of button quail, and he looked after the chickens. No, ma'am, the *Archaeopteryx* hadn't really come from a store. No, ma'am, he'd never heard of a hoatzin. No, ma'am, he wouldn't do anything to hurt his pet. Here, for once, he actually elaborated on his response without being prodded. He hugged his bird to him as he exclaimed, "I love Timmy!"

"Timmy?"

He blushed furiously. "Yes, ma'am, that's his name."

"How old are you, Matthew?" I asked suddenly, looking at the boy for, really, the first time.

"Thirteen," he said shyly.

You don't look it, I thought, but had better sense than to voice the observation. A pang knifed through my belly: I'd been a lot like Matthew when I was his age, all drawn inward around a hard little knot in my gut, forcing myself younger and smaller than I really was. I'd had such a painful sense of the disparity between myself and the Deity that I'd telescoped down into a tiny hall that presented minimum surface area for any almighty thunderbolts. In later years, wising up and sick of cringing, I'd unfolded self, crumpled God up instead, and tossed Him way out into space to disappear.

"Thirteen," I said. "Then you're old enough to understand that if you tell a lie about Timmy, you and your father could be in big trouble. . . ."

I trailed off, watching the bird crawl down Matthew's back and hop off into the grass. The boy placed a warning finger to his lips to keep me shushed.

"Look," he whispered. Timmy fanned his wings before him with an air of alien concentration, darting forward swiftly as a hapless mosquito spiraled into the draft. With a deft motion of the head, the bird swallowed the unlucky insect whole. Matthew, in his enjoyment of the show, forgot his fear of the adult. "He catches flies like that, too," he said, quiet pride in his low voice.

"Cheap to feed, huh?"

"Yeah, you het Pa likes that."

We laughed together before the kid slipped back behind the fear-mask. He was hiding something; I could smell it. But the Hell of it was, there wasn't a feather on that bird that didn't look like the 100% genuine article. And no one should know better than I that the kid wasn't necessarily scared because

of involvement in anything fraudulent. How well I recalled my own childhood secret, the one I'd hidden so carefully because it meant I was evil, wicked, and bad . . . the secret that my father beat me.

I smoked thoughtfully, while the tape hissed ominously in the silence.

Then I rose decisively, tossing away the stub. "I want you to show me the place where you found Timmy."

The boy's mouth twisted down. "Now?"

"No time like the present. See, I'm all ready. I even wore my hiking boots." I kicked out a foot for his inspection, booming out more cheerily than I actually felt.

Without another word, Matthew perched Timmy on his shoulder and strode off toward a wooded area west of the cabin. I followed, keeping up easily.

We'd walked about an hour before Matthew directed me to stop on a broad, flat rock smack in the middle of the scenic creek. The rest felt good, though I had to sit with my knees tucked under my chin. Matthew pulled off his shoes and dangled his feet in the cooling stream. Timmy took the opportunity to crawl down the boy's back and up the leg of my trousers.

"He likes you, ma'am," the boy said. "I never seen him do that to no one but me before."

"Maybe he knows that I like him." The pet posed atop my knee, and I rewarded him with a gentle scratch about the invisible ears. "Listen, Matthew, could you do me a favor, at least when we're not around your folks? Could you please stop calling me ma'am? You make me feel about a hundred years old."

"Yes, ma'am," he said, then paled, a stricken expression in his eyes. He didn't smile until my own chuckle gave him the go-ahead. "Um, what should I call you? Mrs. Waters?"

"No, son, I'm not married. To strangers, I go by Ms. Waters. But you're not a stranger, are you? I guess you better call me Marty."

He laughed outright. The sound did me good. "Marty! That's a boy's name!"

"A boy's name! Whatever do you mean, sir? Do I look like a boy to you?"

"No, um, Marty," he said with a giggle. "I reckon you don't look much like a boy to me."

We both laughed long and hard, giddy with pure silliness. Frankly, this kid was better than a whole hospital full of doctors. All of a sudden, I wanted to breathe in the scent of the cool pines, the running water, the discreet flowers. I allowed myself to remember that I'd always loved the mountains.

After this respite, Matthew and I tramped along for another hour, finally stopping in a grassy clearing filled with flowers. We sat down side by side on a relatively smooth slab of granite, letting Timmy clamber down to try his luck at bug hunting. The noontime sun beamed down from straight overhead. I fanned myself wearily with my hands and thought of cold drinks.

"Got much farther, Matthew?"

The boy had slumped forward to rest his head on his knees. I couldn't see his face. For an instant, I wasn't even sure he'd heard me.

"Marty," he managed at last, his words muffled by his hands. "Do you think — I mean, do you know if maybe God could forgive somebody for doing something wrong if they felt real, real bad about it?"

Kid, I'm the wrong person to ask about God. I put a leaden arm about his shoulders. "Listen, son, I don't think God wants anyone to feel bad. All you have to do is quit doing the wrong thing and ask God to forgive you and He'll forget the whole business. But you don't want to be fretting God with some problem He figures He's already taken care of."

Matthew looked at me with an anguished face. "But supposin you cain't stop," he said. "Supposin you cain't stop doin the wrong thang."

Just then I caught a flurry of action out of the corner of my eye. Without even thinking, I jumped forward and scooped up Timmy like a football. Only after I'd dashed back to the rock with the pet in my arms did my brain register the danger. The little birdbrain had been facing off a copperhead. I decided I didn't feel much like sitting outdoors any more.

"Matthew —" I began, then stopped, watching the snake slither off with morbid fascination. I started shaking badly as I realized what a damned fool stunt I'd pulled. I inhaled sharply. "Matthew, we got much farther?"

The boy looked up for a long moment, then returned his gaze to the spot in the grass where the copperhead had disappeared. He was probably trying to figure out just how much of a crazy lady I really was.

"Come on," he said at last. His voice sounded fractionally older. We traveled maybe a hundred yards more. Then we stood at the edge of the wood. He pointed off toward the horizon.

We were looking at the back of the Ramsey cabin. Matthew had been taking me in circles.

"What's going on, son?" I asked quietly. Timmy kissed me carefully with his toothed beak, but I ignored the distraction. "Have you been telling me a story?"

Matthew's dark eyes clouded over as if he were fighting back tears. I put my hand on his arm to steady him.

"I didn't find Timmy," he admitted. "I dunno where I was gonna take you just now. I reckon I figured I'd tthink up somethin. But I cain't lie to you no more." He sniffed sub-audibly. "I didn't find Timmy. I batched him."

"Vistles!" A woman's voice drifted faintly across the open grass. Matthew snapped back into the super-respectful kiddy role.

"We gotta go eat, ma'am," he said. He turned and started trotting toward the house. I hurried after him, panting, Timmy clinging precariously to the collar of my shirt with his peculiar claws.

I damned my rotten luck. On the verge of a major revelation, I'd have to

sit through some greasy home-cooked meal, my stomach churning over the last enigmatic statement. "I hatched him." Now what in Hell was that supposed to mean? I conjured up mad visions of chicken coops filled with Timmy's relations.

The elder Ramseys greeted me congenially for mountain folk, which is to say that on this occasion Joe had dispensed with the shotgun. His evangelical fervor had also waned, presumably because he now numbered me among the Elect. Matthew said nothing about my foolishness with the copperhead, for which I thanked Appalachian taciturnity. Valley folk would have gushed gratitude all over me, making me feel like a fraud as well as an idiot. After all, who in their right mind would risk their butt to save a bird, even if the damned thing was about the rarest critter on the planet?

As we had nothing of consequence to say, the four of us ate in silence after a brief exchange about the weather. Again, not usual behavior outside Appalachia, yet somehow not unpleasant. I had plenty of private speculation to occupy my mind while I shoveled down black-eyed peas.

After lunch, I flipped the recorder back on and slung the camera about my neck. Matthew led me to his bedroom for explanations. He said nothing until I'd settled myself in the one ancient chair and had a chance to look around.

This cupboard-sized room seemed not as mean and poverty-stricken as the rest of the house. At first I wasn't sure why. Chairs, bedframe, and chest of drawers were clearly homemade with the cheapest of materials. Then I noticed the TV perched on a cabinet shoved up against the foot of the bed.

Of course. The television set. The hallmark of a civilized home. Even my own hardscrabble parents had possessed a color set these twenty years, a carefully maintained old workhorse that held the place of honor in the living room. That TV had become the focus of my adult visits home. (How modern we've become, I always thought. We've learned to hide our silences behind football games and re-runs of *Hee-Haw*.) It was typical of these people that the kid automatically switched the picture on, although neither of us was interested in watching.

I recalled then that the Ramsey living room had held no TV. I suddenly realized just how poor these people really were, that they couldn't even afford this shabby pretense at prosperity.

Matthew saw me looking at the set. "We got that from the junkyard. Pa says he reckons we got the first one ever made. A genuine antique."

He laughed softly so that I would understand he'd made a joke. I ran my eyes over the words inscribed on the front of the cumbersome object: RCA VICTOR/KODACHROMATIC.

"I reckon your Pa is right," I smiled.

Matthew blushed a little before entrusting me with his secret. "I was a stupid kid," he said, his voice a breath away from a whisper. "I asked for a TV set for Christmas a couple years ago. I shoulda knowed we didn't have

no money — I was purely stupid. But Pa found this one, all it needed was some tubes and stuff. We learned how to fix it up out of a library book." Although the kid's eyes were glued to the floor, I saw his emotion. I couldn't help sympathizing, although I hid my pity because I knew it would anger him. But wouldn't it be a lot easier if parents were jerks all the time?

"Whos, old lady, I told myself. You aren't here to play child psych. You got a story to crack.

"Can you tell me how you happened to hatch Timmy?" I asked.

He nodded soberly and directed my attention to the homemade chicken-wire and wood cage sitting atop the TV. "That's Timmy's Ma and Pa in there."

I couldn't see anything from where I was sitting, so I got up to peer into the bottom of the cage. Two fist-sized brown birds were bathing their tiny bodies in the sand. They looked like nothing so much as a pair of stunted chickens. I unenthusiastically snapped a few shots and set the camera down on top of the TV next to the cage. One of the birds cocked a suspicious eye my way.

"Son, he shore don't take after them none," I said, reverting to dialect to disguise my confusion. What could I say? The kid seemed sincere, but Hell, something damned strange was going on around here. I noticed that Timmy, from his perch on Matthew's shoulder, evidenced a complete lack of interest in his supposed parents.

Matthew struggled visibly for words. At last he began to stutter. "These is buttons, ma'am, um, Marty, um, button quail. I saved up over a year to buy this pair. Ten dollars they cost me. See, ma'am, I purely love birds." He paused for a moment. "I take care of the chickens, but it ain't the same. Chickens ain't pets. See, I wanted a chick to follow me, but you can't go nowhere with a danged rooster tagging along. So I got me these quail." He ran down abruptly.

"So did you ever get any chicks?" I prodded gently, shaken by the expression on his face.

"Chicks? Yuh, I got me some chicks. Not too many. Most the eggs didn't hatch. I cracked one open one time to see. It had this — this thang in it." He shuddered. "All my chicks was crippled, ever last one. Pa made me wring their necks. It was cruel to let them live. I knew he was right because they hurt too had to eat, but it purely cut me up inside." Another long pause. "But Timmy was different. I didn't show him to Pa because he woulda reckoned Timmy better go too. He didn't look nothing right, he had them claws and them teeth. But I seen him eating and I — I wanted me a pet. So I took him out and kep him in a box til he was growed. Then I tole Pa I ketched him."

"How did you feed him?" I asked, incredulous, sure I'd found the flaw.

"With chicken scratch, same as his Ma and Pa."

Naturally. After all, Timmy was nothing but an overgrown quail with a

long bony tail, claws, and teeth. Right.

"Listen, Matthew," I said carefully. "Do you understand how incredible your story is? Can you see why a person might find it hard to believe? I mean, how in — on earth can you explain how these quail laid an egg containing *Archaeopteryx*?"

Matthew met my eyes for the first time since the discussion began. "It's simple, Marty," he replied. "I prayed to God to give me a special pet. I reckon he sent Timmy down as a miracle for me."

"A miracle." My voice harshened cruelly as the word brought back a flood of bitter memories. My preacher father. The hellfire church. How many times had I prayed for some sign, some companion, some puny, tiny thing to help me out in my fear and uncertainty? But God had kept his back to me. "Tell me, Matthew, where was my miracle?" The kid stared up at me with a pale face. I forced myself to shake the anger from my voice as I reached for a cigarette. "I don't believe in miracles, son, I just — just don't. There has to be a logical scientific explanation and I'm not resting until I find it."

Matthew nodded in tribute to my adult wisdom, but I'm not sure he believed me. Hell, I'm not sure I believed me.

Back in the teeming metropolis of Stoney, I decided it was time to call in the cavalry. I dropped off my film at the overnight developers and headed back to the Sleepy Teddy, where I phoned long-distance the ornithologist who had lent me all the bird books.

"Calvin, it's Marty. HELP!"

"What's the matter, no birds at Club Med?" He was teasing me. I'd had to tell him I wasn't really going on vacation in order to explain the sudden interest in our feathered friends.

"You won't believe it."

"Try me."

"I have an *Archaeopteryx* that hatched out of a button quail egg."

"You're right. I don't believe you. You been hitting the moonshine up there?"

"Give me a break. I'm at my wit's end." I handed him the lowdown on Timmy. A loud silence greeted the end of my story.

Then he started laughing.

"Come on, Cal, this is costing me. I didn't call you long-distance to give you a belly laugh."

"Oh, Marty, you of all people — never mind. How about this? You ever heard of neoteny?"

"Should I have?"

"Um, well, it's a term for the process whereby an organism retains the characteristics of its youth."

"So?"

"Haven't you ever heard the phrase 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny'?"

"Sure, I was discussing it with my broker just last weekend. Come on, Cal, speak English."

"OK, one more time. Are you aware that an embryo tends to go through the same stages of development that the species did?"

"You're talking about things, like, at a certain point, a fetus has the gills of a fish, later the webbed toes of an amphibian, and God knows what else before it gets born as a human baby?"

"Bingo. Now birds go through the same thing. In fact, some scientists think that ostriches make up a whole family of neotenuous birds. They're essentially overgrown chicks. Their development is in many ways forever prepubescent. Their wings are eternally stunted in comparison with their bodies —"

"Cal. Yoo hoo, Earth calling Cal. Timmy ain't no ostrich. Even one so dull as I can see this."

"But you've got the analogous problem. Only instead of getting stuck at say 'just-hatched' level, as in the ostriches, Timmy got stuck even earlier at some transitional bird-archosaurian stage that other birds leave behind in the egg. He's not a real *Archaeopteryx*, needless to say, but he looks enough like what you'd expect one to that you go ahead and give him that name."

"So what is he really?"

"Why, a mutated button quail."

"Great. Any idea what would cause the mutation?"

"Who knows, Marty? Every time I turn around, we've discovered another new toxin. Dioxin springs to mind right away, but only because it's had so much recent publicity. There's a host of contaminants that the parents could have ingested in food or water or even the air. And of course there's radiation . . . Hell, the list of possible mutagens stretches from here to eternity. Your best bet is to keep your eyes open."

"Thanks, Cal. I'll be in touch."

"Wait, don't hang up. Listen, Marty, if you write up this thing about the *Archaeopteryx*, do me a favor, will you, hon? Keep my name out of it."

"Sure thing, Cal."

I dropped the receiver thoughtfully. Funny how a scientific sounding word like "mutagen" made me feel so much better than a magic word like "miracle." Neither one explained a damn thing. Neither one gave me the Cause. I took a cigarette break and tried to empty my mind so that the ideas would come.

But nothing. Except the sudden frightening thought that Matthew and his parents might also be exposed to the unknown poison. The boy's words echoed ominously in my brain. "I cracked one open . . . it had this — this thang inside. All my chicks were crippled, ever last one."

The next morning I had to cool my heels until ten o'clock, the time my photos were due back at the drop, giving me abundant opportunity for non-

productive meditation. I was damned if I knew what to do. Should I call out the health people, have the soil and water and who knows what all tested? Hell, even if I saved the Ramseys' lives, they might not thank me for it. Where would they go, if their land were bad, some housing project in some big city? And if I were wrong, I might still have ruined them. Who'd buy tobacco and produce that were rumored to cause freaks? For better or for worse, I decided not to act until I'd gotten more information.

After all that waiting, I discovered that the damned developer had screwed up my prints. Overexposed, every last one. Worthless. I showed them to the heavyset woman sitting in the cubicle.

"Sorry, honey, I won't charge you for 'em," she drawled indifferently.

"I should think not," I muttered as I stalked away.

"Wait." I turned to see her broad upper body leaning perilously far out the window of the booth. "Your replacement roll of film."

"Thanks," I said, instantly sorry that I'd assumed the worst. Anyway, who knows, it was remotely possible I'd botched the shots myself.

I arrived at the cabin a little before noon. Matthew and Timmy were waiting for me. The boy's face fell when I explained about the pictures. He'd already told me that the only photo he had of his pet was the grainy black-and-white from the local paper. I apologized and promised to try again.

He led me into his room solemnly. His face looked troubled for some reason, but I assumed I was merely projecting my own uncertainty. The kid leaned forward as I slipped on the recorder.

"Marty," he began, then halted.

"Just a few questions," I said, trying to make my voice sound casual. "You ever see any deformed chickens?"

"No, ma'am, uh, Marty. Pa says he seen a two-headed rooster at the county fair once."

"You fed your quail from the same bin you feed the chickens? The exact same scratch?"

"Yuh."

"You ever feed the little guys anything else?"

"All kinds of stuff. Leftover salad greens, boiled eggs, cake crumbs, crackers. . . . They purely love mustard greens."

Table scraps. Wonderful.

"How about water? You get your water from the county?"

"No, ma'am, an artesian well."

Was that good or bad? I sighed.

"You ever give your quail medicine or vitamins or anything like that?"

"I never had to give no medicine, but I do put the drops in the water." He handed me a small plastic bottle with a cartoon bird sketched on the label. I inspected the list of ingredients critically, but it looked OK, no more dangerous than a person's daily multi-vitamin.

Cal was right. The contaminant could be any of a thousand things. And I

hadn't been able to rule a one of them out. Except for the chicken scratch, which posed no danger to the Ramseys anyway. I turned off the recorder and loaded my camera. As long as I was getting so much accomplished, I figured I might as well reshoot the pictures.

"Since we're inside, I'm going to go ahead and try to get Timmy's parents again, OK?"

Matthew nodded, then stood up, shifting from foot to foot uneasily. "What is it, son?" I asked as I double-checked the light meter.

"I been thinkin'."

"Yes?" I framed the homemade cage within my lens.

"Maybe I better tell Pa the truth about where Timmy come from."

I snapped once, then leaned forward for a close-up of the quail themselves. "That's probably best, son. He's going to find out anyway when he reads the news story."

I twirled the lens around a little, adjusting my focus. Then I felt a thud as something hit my shoulder. I slipped and smacked my hand against the TV screen.

"Damnation!"

"You OK, ma'am?" Matthew grabbed my arm anxiously. "It was just Timmy jumping up on your shoulder. He didn't mean no harm."

I patted at the bird reassuringly. "It's OK, son, I know he didn't mean anything by it, he just startled me. But your —" I remembered the kid's age and selected another adjective — old TV set shocked the living Hell out of me." I rubbed my tingling hand. That damned antique was downright dangerous. Why'd the kid have to keep it on all the time, anyway? Then I froze as something clicked into place. I ignored Timmy as he brushed against my jaw with his grotesque head. How had I been shocked through glass?

"Matthew," I said a bit wildly. "You got a screwdriver?"

The boy went unquestioningly to the chest of drawers to fetch the tool. I snatched it from his hand.

"Help me push this cabinet out into the middle of the floor. I'm opening this sucker up."

His eyes widened, but he dared not disobey an adult. We inched the home-made stand, TV, cage, and all far enough from the wall so that I could go to town on the back. I was looking at the set's guts in five minutes flat.

I saw about what I'd expected. The old clinker had no X-ray shielding. Maybe it never had; maybe it had gotten lost when the Ramseys were playing amateur electrician. I sat back slowly on my heels to work it out.

X-rays. You'd think someone my age would remember X-rays, the villains of a thousand black-and-white schlock movies. But Hell, you figured the Blob or Godzilla or the Cockroach That Ate Cincinnati, not harmless little Timmy.

Yet it fit. It all fit. Electrons collide with the screen, "shocking" me through glass. Meanwhile, X-rays are being produced tangential to the pic-

ture tube, beaming merrily away at anything to the side — or on top. I remembered setting my camera down by the cage on top of the TV. No wonder my prints were overexposed. And Timmy's parents, well Hell, they lived up there.

I must have sat staring into that ancient set for quite a while before Matthew dared to nudge me.

"Marty? What is it?"

"It's your TV, son. The X-rays from the TV caused the bad eggs, the crippled chickens, and — Timmy."

The kid looked at me for a minute as if he thought I'd gone nuts. Then the light dawned. Of course. He understood. Wasn't he a regular TV viewer? He knew all about the evils of radiation.

"Timmy's a mutant, isn't he?"

I nodded.

"I reckon I better go tell Pa."

He slipped off. I shrugged at his back. Case closed. I could pack up and go. But instead I turned to stroke the little bird. I'd gotten attached to the ugly runt. I'd kind of hate to leave him behind. Then I thought of the kid. He loved this critter too, and he'd most likely lose it when the scientific community got wind of the story. Oh, I'm sure the Ramseys would be well compensated for their contribution to knowledge . . . but still, poor Matthew.

I scratched around the presumptive ears thoughtfully as I pondered the ultimate fate of the unique pet. Of course, he'd have to go to a laboratory, he'd have to be studied. He was truly one in a million, maybe one in a billion, maybe the only one ever. Who'd be able to calculate the odds against such a thing happening again? The radiation had had to connect with the DNA just so, to allow the birth of a new organism instead of destroying its chances for survival entirely.

Matthew had been right all along. Little Timmy was a miracle.

Then Joe Ramsey stood at the door, his face terrible. Matthew crouched behind him, moaning. I thought I understood.

"Don't worry, Mr. Ramsey, Matthew will be able to have normal kids. See, the radiation goes out at right angles to the picture tube. People sitting in front of the set are OK. I'm sure only the birds were affected."

Ramsey scowled. "You're mad, woman," he said in a low voice. "Such a thang as what my son tole me, it cain't be."

I blinked at him. Perhaps he hadn't understood my hasty explanation. I made a new start, but he silenced me with a violent wave of the arm.

"My son says his two quail hatched out this gryphon." He pointed threateningly at Timmy, who ducked his head behind my neck. "Did you put him up to the tale?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why, then, does he tell it?"

"Because it's true, Mr. Ramsey. At least that's what Matthew told me and I believe him."

Ramsey moved forward spasmodically and plucked the bird from my shoulder with both hands. "Devil, demon, deceiver," he cried. "Thou angel from Hell, thou shalt die."

"NO!" Ramsey and I both turned to look at the boy. His eyes were full of tears, but he met his father's gaze bravely. "No. Why should Timmy gotta die?"

"Because people might be misled. Because people might be deceived and their souls fall into Hell for eternal torment. Why, if people heard that these quail had this — this freak, they might say that maybe an ape could birth a man. And then they'd forget they ever had a Creator."

"Honestly, Ramsey, evolutionists have never proposed that an ape could have a human child —"

But no one was listening to me. Matthew had drawn himself up to his full height. "You ain't talkin sense, Pa. How can truth deceive? You talk all a time about the truth and the way, and you afraid of a bitty bird. Maybe you don't know the truth yourself."

We three stood frozen for an endless time. Matthew's outburst had astonished all of us, himself by far the most. He'd challenged authority for the first time. I would have cheered had the situation not been so cruel.

I reflected on the irony that Matthew himself had pinpointed so nicely. Timmy had shaken the old man's faith in the miraculous — and mine in the scientific. Maybe neither of us had a particular monopoly on truth that day.

Then Ramsey made his decision.

Later I told Cal I'd heard a single snap as from a twig broken in two. Then the bird lay still. Nothing to study or understand. No pictures. No story. Only silence.

But it wasn't quite so neat. I, a grown-up like Joe Ramsey, had learned the value of lies. And so I killed the story. Maybe someday someone else will seek out the truth about the latter-day *Archaeopteryx*, have him poked and prodded and pulled apart for science in some laboratory. But I hope not. I hope Matthew and Timmy get to stay together as long as a boy and his pet can.



# Screen Reviews

by Baird Searles

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## Short Forms

The big news of the last TV season was the return of the "anthology" series with ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS, AMAZING STORIES™ (that's a familiar title — where have I heard it before?), and THE TWILIGHT ZONE with new episodes. The first-named is strictly suspense edging slightly into the macabre, so it's the others, dealing in fantasy, that we'll consider here.

What they all have in common, of course, is that they are what in print would be short stories — short short stories in some cases, where three tales are crammed into an hour episode. So if you're after depth, or the lengthy exploration of a concept, or what in print has become known as "a good read," forget it. These are one-idea yarns — often enough the ordinary person running into a bizarre person, place, event, or thing (the unexplained magical artifact is always a good hook on which to hang a brief plot). At their worst, they become gimmick stories, annoyingly irrational and calling forth in the true lover of fantasy the libelously traditional reaction attributed to Chinese food — hungry again in half an hour for something substantial.

At their best (which, as in almost everything, happens only occasionally), they become short little gems that delight, or even more rarely, surprise. In the first six weeks or so of the new series, there were various familiar devices, handled with greater or lesser degrees of freshness: the alien that could assume the shape of specific

human beings; the magic pendant which freezes time for all but the wearer; the total-experience machine which allows one to lead another life; the refugee from another time who finds himself in the baffling modern world.

Two of the stories stuck in the mind longer than half an hour. "Ye Gods" (by Anne Collins) concerned a yuppie type who runs afoul of the god Eros, still operating in the modern world. Condemned by Eros to be haunted by a love-at-first-sight lady whom he will never find again in the flesh, our hero tracks down Bacchus, also alive and well here and now. With the help of the god of wine, he sets out to fix Eros's love life, the going awry of which has caused his bad temper in the first place. It seems that Eros and Megaira, one of the Furies, had been a thing but have split up. The desperate executive evokes Megaira, who is some tough lady ("What the Hell do you want?" is her opening line, and she keeps dropping threats about turning people into tree toads and snail darters). All ends happily, need we say. The-Greek-Gods-loose-in-the-contemporary-world is not exactly a new idea, but this had some real wit and a marvelously light touch.

"A Message from Charity" was the other better-than-average offering. An adolescent boy living in today's New England and a girl of the Massachusetts Colony of 1700 are somehow put in telepathic touch through a shared fever. He has a grand time showing

her the wonders of the modern world, since she can see through his eyes (and taste with his mouth — she learns the joys of chocolate ice cream), though not the reverse, for some arbitrary reason. What doesn't occur to either of them is that if she talks of this, and she inevitably does, she's going to be accused of witchcraft; she does and she is, and how he saves her with some quick-thinking research makes up the bulk of the story. The young people are appealing and sensible types, and the teleplay by Alan Brennert based on a story by Alan M. Lee had an authentic, unsticky sweetness.

Both of these were on **THE TWILIGHT ZONE**, but one must give **AMAZING STORIES** the edge on production. Steven Spielberg's bright, shiny touch is evident throughout, and the result is a program with a gloss and style seldom seen on TV. Real planes with cartoon wheels flying in amber-colored clouds; ghost trains — all flashing lights and pastel steam — charging through a suburban living room; a magnetic teen-ager stuck on a row of metal lockers: the productions are literally amazing.

The old **TWILIGHT ZONE** programs, judging from the nostalgic glow in persons of a certain age when they're mentioned, introduced much of a generation of youngsters to a sense of wonder and fantasy. With luck, this new crop will do the same.

### Primal Tarzan

Back in the 1950s, the "Late Show" was a real institution, on which, after prime time, you could discover wonderful movies which somehow you had missed or that were from before your time ("revival house" meant a fundamentalist church in those days). One of the many peculiar cable channels has brought back something of that

feeling by showing, on Saturday nights, some really oddball flicks, obscure foreign movies or antiques that one could never hope to see elsewhere, even in a revival house. Recently they showed the very first Tarzan movie; and so far as I'm concerned, it was something to see. Its correct title is *Tarzan of the Apes* and it was produced in 1917.

It is, of course, silent, and extraordinarily primitive by our standards, lasting less than an hour. Tarzan is played by one Elmo Lincoln (who had previously had roles in D. W. Griffith's films, among them, *Intolerance*). Lincoln has a figure that can only be described as rectangularly urbane (Burroughs's constant adjective "lithic" was obviously ignored), and he wears an unfortunate wig; the general effect is that of a grizzly emerging from a haystack. Jane comes on the scene with not only the usual safari of wimps, but a black maid in full uniform whose stereotyped carryings-on make the later antics of Stepin Fetchit look liberated.

The tales are masterpieces of silent screen writing, carrying not a little of the Burroughs flavor. The best one, when Jane had fainted into Elmo's slab-like arms yet again, reads: "The nearness of the clinging form, the warm touch of the first woman he had ever known, thrilled Tarzan with a new emotion and every throbbing pulsebeat spurred him to take her for his own." Elmo Lincoln acting out that bit of purple prose was a truly memorable sight. He doesn't, of course, take her for his own after Jane comes to and explains that civilized men don't force the affections of ladies; the throbbing pulsebeats get turned off immediately.

Ludicrous, yes. But a marvelous piece of film history.

## Videowares

*The Purple Rose of Cairo* (Vestron) takes one back to the movies of the 1930s in a couple of ways: first because it's about a '30s movie; and second, because it has the quality of those whimsical fantasies of that period, when ordinary people became involved with supernatural events. The supernatural event in this case is a very movie device: a character in a not-very-major motion picture of the Depression years suddenly addresses a remark to a member of the audience. This happens to be a bedraggled housewife who escapes her dreary life by seeing movies — the same movies — over and over again. The movie character, a sort of second-lead glamour boy whose major function is to give the leading lady someone to flirt with, is dressed in puttees and a pith helmet (he's an explorer; the movie is called *The Purple Rose of Cairo*) and is enchanted by how often the housewife has been in the audience for his movie. So he steps down off the screen to get to know her better.

One of the delicious things about this movie (the *real* movie, not the movie *in* the movie; I can see this piece is going to get complicated) is that from the initial unlikely premise, everything else follows absolutely logically in a whacky sort of way. The other characters in the movie are totally thrown for a loop by this unprecedented behavior, and sit around the glamorous penthouse set discussing how they can continue without the absentee. In the meantime, he is having a hard time adjusting to the real world where love-making ends in sex rather than a chance fadeout, and cars don't start the minute you put your hands on the steering wheel. When the actor who has created the character is flown in to

somehow persuade the fugitive to get back into the movie, things get very complicated indeed (he also takes a shine to the dreary housewife). And when the character does return to the movie, he takes her with him, and we see her, in her dowdy readymade frock, interacting with the movie's plot in scenes which we have seen before without her, to chaotic effect.

This is a whole lot of fun, and Mia Farrow is sensational as the lackluster lady. If you like those cinema whimsies of the thirties, especially the Thorne Smith-inspired ones made before the genre got oversentimental, pick *The Purple Rose of Cairo*.

*The Company of Wolves* (Vestron) was greeted with such universal bafflement by American mainstream reviewers that one felt that it had to be something special, even if one hadn't seen the generally ecstatic English notices. And the attempt to market it (through TV and newspaper ads) as a sort of werewolf story didn't help matters.

It's based on an Angela Carter short story, which means it's going to have Overtones, with a vengeance. But basically, it's the story of Little Red Riding Hood. She lives in a small village in a great wood with her mother and father. We first see the family at the funeral of her older sister, who was killed in the forest by a pack of wolves. There is also Granny, who lives in a cottage some distance away in the wood, and is one of those dear old ladies who have down through the ages delighted in frightening the children with gruesome tales that are supposedly cautionary, but in reality perpetuate the bitterness and bleakness of sour old age (hence "old wives' tales").

As the story unfolds, we see three of these stories dramatized: one of a

woman who marries a stranger who deserts her to run with the wolves on their wedding night, and then after she remarries, returns and changes into a wolf; one of a village girl impregnated by a member of the local aristocracy, who crashes his wedding party and changes all the guests into wolves; and one of a local lad who meets the Devil in the forest with improbable results. The girl herself tells a story of a wounded she-wolf who becomes a woman and stays among humans for a time.

There is finally the climactic journey to Grandma's house, where indeed LRRH meets a suave stranger in the forest. After a picnic on the contents of the basket meant for Granny, he bets her a kiss that he can get to Granny's cottage before she can. He wins, unpleasant old Granny is satisfactorily (and ungorily) done in, and the final confrontation is thoroughly surprising. I'll give only one thing away — there's

not a woodsman in sight.

As for Overtones and Significance — there's lots, but not to worry, it doesn't get in the way. The various wolves throughout are an equation for sexuality, but hardly negatively (except in Granny's view), and the story is framed as the dream of a modern young girl (the same actress who plays LRRH), trembling (as they say) on the brink of adolescence.

The look of the whole thing is marvelous: this is a true fairy-tale village and wood, the latter alive with wild things aside from the wolves. There are a few Cocteauesque touches — in the one tale, the Devil arrives in a chauffeured Rolls-Royce. One of the man-to-wolf transformations is rather horrifically done, but it's not gratuitously nasty. And the wolves are wonderful, coursing through the forest or emerging suddenly from its moonlit depths.

▷◁

## SO GROWS THE TREE

It is at the very tips of the branches,  
where the bending twigs discuss  
their future goals, it is at the tips  
of the branches, where roles are first adopted,  
whether to grow north or south or whether to grow  
at all, it is there at the tips  
of the twigs, among the children counting  
their birthdays with a furious wish  
to be older and free, it is there  
at the tips of the branches that the rose will appear.

— Tom Disch

# BILLY JEAN AND THE BIG BIRD

by Sharon N. Farber

art: George Barr



*Between sending us "Rolls Rex, King of Cars" and the present story, Sharon Farber returned to visit her native San Francisco Bay area, where a relict population of the types depicted in these tales still valiantly keeps up a tradition extinct almost everywhere else.*

"Hey man, want some zucchini crêpes?" asked Aunt Barbara.

The child remained on the cushions, staring at her sneakers.

"Oh, I dig — You're sulking. Hey Moondog! Billy Jean's sulking."

"Oooh, bad vibes," opined the much-bearded man, not looking up as he loaded homegrown marijuana into the massive Turkish hookah.

"Like, sulking's bad for you. You should try meditation or something."

The little girl nodded and left the dark cabin, stumbling over the pack of friendly dogs gathered outside the door in hope of zucchini. She took off up the hill, trees quickly hiding any trace of the commune.

At the top of the ridge the child stopped and sat upon a huge stump which had two second-growth redwoods emerging from it. This part of the forest had never been touched by fire or loggers. The redwoods were all over a hundred feet tall, with only large primeval ferns growing in the fine mesh of sunlight that filtered to the moist forest floor.

The forest looked, in fact, almost exactly like the redwood forest in *Return of the Jedi*. All it lacked was Ewoks.

"Wish there were Ewoks," Billy Jean thought. "I'd take 'em to Show 'n' Tell, and that'd show that mean old Davie Epstein."

The enemy in question was the star of kindergarten. Two weeks ago he'd shown his dad's very talented home computer; one week ago he'd brought an entire suit of armor. This week he'd topped all previous performances with a parrot that spoke three languages and shouted, "Damn the torpedoes, full steam ahead!"

Billy Jean, on the other hand, had not been allowed to bring in the commune's ornate hookah. Last week she'd brought in Sunflower's Rock ("Like feel how smooth it is. This rock and me go way back.") and this week she'd had to settle for a collection of old comic books. "Hey, they'll love 'em," Moondog had said. "Wow, here's a *Zap*, and the *Freak Brothers*, and far out! *My New Adventures of Jesus*!"

Unfortunately, the underground comix had given Miss Phosphor an anginal attack, and had resulted in Billy Jean's being sent to the principal's office. The last thing she'd seen as she'd left the room had been mean old Davie Epstein, sticking out his tongue at her.

"I'll show him," she thought, then looked up. Something was moving in the corner of her eye.

The child leapt off the stump, landing on the green object and knocking it to the ground.

"Will ye leggo?"

She fell back, still clutching one edge of a Kelly-green coat.

"Who are you?"

The tiny man dusted himself off. "I'm a leprechaun, of course, Fergus McFungus by name. What'd ye think I'd be?"

"Wow. A leprechaun?" She knew they had something to do with breakfast cereal.

"I suppose ye'll be wantin' the pot of gold now."

"Huh?"

"The pot of gold. Ye earn it by catchin' a leprechaun."

The little girl said, "Don't you live in Ireland or something?"

"Well, aye, we did once, but we came over from the Auld Country during the Potato Famine, like everyone else. Now would ye be likin' yer gold in nuggets or sovereigns or doubloons?"

Billy Jean was gazing avariciously at the little man. "Boy'll you impress 'em."

"Impress who, lass?"

"My kindergarten class. You're almost as neat as an Ewok." Maybe he could wear a fur coat.

"Oh, so ye dinna want gold, but ye want to impress yer friends?"

"Mean old Davie Epstein brought a parrot. You're better'n a parrot."

"Aye, that I am, but ye canna take me to school. I've . . . I've . . . Leprosy! Aye, I've got leprosy, it's the curse of all the leprechauns, we canna go anywhere. But I'd like to help you, lass, so I'll give ye a bird that'll surpass any parrot."

Billy Jean agreed, but when she actually saw the bird, she began to regret having shaken on it. The bird was big, she had to admit that — full five feet tall. But it was old and ratty looking, with most of its feathers missing and the few remaining ones a dingy yellow.

"Just needs feedin' up now," Fergus assured her.

"Does he do tricks?"

"Tricks? Tricks? Lass, this is the one and only Phoenix. He doesn't have to do tricks. What's the world comin' to?" As if to agree, the bird emitted a melancholy cheep.

"Now be gentle wi' him." He handed her the leash. "He's 500 years old and not gettin' any younger — at least, not yet." And with that cryptic remark, the chuckling leprechaun faded into the forest.

As luck would have it, no one was home. Billy Jean put her new pet in her room, the guest bedroom, which was actually a walk-in closet. (The cabin's only bedroom was occupied by Barbara and Tony; Sunflower and John had the couch in the living room; Bambooshoot slept in his van; and Moondog lived in a tree.) The bird settled down on the sleeping bag and began to groom its few feathers.

Billy Jean stared at the bird, then went into the kitchen, crawled onto the counter, and began to pull out bottles of vitamins and minerals. She mixed up a large batch, adding some kelp for good measure, then camouflaged the pills with some alfalfa sprouts and a handful of marijuana seeds.

While the bird ate, she went out and watered the garden. She was returning to the cabin with an armful of kindling for the woodstove, when she noticed Moondog sitting on the outside stairs.

He fixed her with one bloodshot eye. "Billy Jean, you ever done acid?"

She shook her head. "I fingerpaint sometimes, and I did my chores."

"I haven't done acid for — gee, I dunno, when was Woodstock? I figured, you know, why look for God when it's obvious He doesn't care if I find Him or not. So I did stocks 'n' bonds for a while."

"Uh huh," Billy Jean agreed, wishing he'd move and let her into the cabin.

"But you know, I think I'm having an acid flashback. 'Cause I could swear there's a five-foot-tall bird in the guest room."

"Oh, that's just Big Bird."

He looked skeptical.

"He's mine," continued the little girl. "The leprechaun gave him to me."

Moondog rose, opened the cabin door an inch, gazed in, then closed it. He shrugged and began walking towards his treehouse. Pausing at the woodpile, he turned back. "You, uh, better move it then. Tony's allergic to feathers."

Billy Jean took Big Bird outside just as the rest of the commune drove up. Barking wildly, the dogs leapt from the car windows and circled the bird.

"Wow," Barbara said, as she and the other hippies pulled the dogs away.

A stranger got out of the car, a man with three days' blond stubble and a torn t-shirt that said NUKE THE WHALES. "Far out," he said. "Me for the drumsticks."

The bird turned a malevolent purple eye on him and began chasing him in circles about the old Valiant. He scrambled atop the car and danced on the roof.

"Hey man, the finish," Tony called.

"Get it away!" The bird pecked at his hiking boots. He reached under his fringed vest and pulled out a revolver.

Billy Jean caught hold of the bird's leash, shouting "Don't shoot Big Bird! Don't shoot!"

"It's okay, Billy Jean. Go lock him in the garden," Aunt Barbara said. "And you, mister — I'll have you know that we're all mellow, nonsmoking vegetarians here, and we don't get off on guns. So you can still crash here tonight, but tomorrow you *split*."

The grubby hitchhiker was gone the next morning when Billy Jean got up to feed Big Bird before the school bus came.

The garden was fenced in by wood and chicken wire sufficient to keep out rabbits and deer and anyone else inclined to munch on vegetables or marijuana. Billy Jean had a fine time playing hide and seek with Big Bird in the immense tangle of corn and beans and cash crop. Then she fed him a serving-bowl full of marijuana seeds.

Over the ensuing week, the regimen of seeds and vitamins made the bird fatter and sleeker. His few feathers began to shine. When Billy Jean checked on Big Bird at night before bed, she thought he glowed.

The seventh morning she sat on a pumpkin, petting the bird while he sank his beak into the bowl of little round seeds.

"This is the last of the dope seeds," Billy Jean said. "But tomorrow's Show 'n' Tell, and boy is that mean old Davie Epstein gonna have a fit when he sees you."

"Billy Jean-ah!"

"Yeah?"

"Breakfast!" came the distant voice.

"Gotta go," she told the bird, leaving the garden to meet her aunt. "I was just feeding Big Bird. . . ."

There was a loud **whoomp!** and the dogs all jumped backwards, their hair standing on end, and began to bark. A pillar of flames erupted from the garden and towered fifty feet in the air.

"Fire!" Barbara shrieked. "Tony Moondog John Bambooshoot Sunflower! Help!"

Billy Jean grabbed the garden hose, aiming its feeble spray at the fire.

The rest of the commune came running towards the burning garden. "Oh no, the dope! We don't have any more!" Tony cried. "Do something!"

Moondog shrugged. "I am, man. Like, I'm inhaling deeply."

"How'd it start?"

Billy Jean watched as tomatoes, squash, beans, and corn shrivelled into ashes. Back spray from the hose nozzle mingled with her tears. "My bird must've started it."

The hippies turned angrily toward the girl. "Your bird . . ."

Suddenly the dogs began to bark again. The people spun about to find themselves facing a half-dozen county deputies, one of whom, though now shaved and uniformed, had obviously been their gun-toting hitchhiker.

The policemen were gazing despairingly at the fire.

"My evidence," moaned the erstwhile hitchhiker.

The billows of acrid smoke parted. They saw the remnants of the pillar of flame, now crackling about a five-foot bird skeleton.

"My phoenix . . ." Billy Jean sobbed, aiming the hose at it.

"Dig it!" Moondog yelled, as the skeleton collapsed into ashes, and then reformed as a glowing bird, its plumage fiery red and gold.

"Don't breathe that smoke," one policeman cried. Another shouted, "I don't believe this!"

The bird rose from the fire, hovering momentarily over the cloud of smoke. Cawing once at the little girl, the golden bird turned and flew away.

"Goodbye, Big Bird," Billy Jean said.

Barbara muttered, "Thanks, bird, you saved our ass." Then she turned a jaundiced eye at the uniformed audience. "Well," she said. "Don't just stand there, call the fire department."

The child sat sulking on the redwood stump. Her class had been real

impressed by the Junior Firefighters Award from the Buena Vista Fire Department, but then mean old Davie Epstein had brought out the genuine hundred-year-old Galapagos tortoise that you could ride on, and that made a mess on Miss Phosphor's shoes.

Billy Jean heard soft hoofbeats. A delicate, milk-white pony stepped out of the trees and came forward to lay his head on the girl's lap. The pony had a long golden horn on his forehead. Big brown eyes looked up, begging for an ear-scratching.

Billy Jean scrambled out from under the head, and started down the hill. The pony began to follow.

Disgusted, Billy Jean turned back. "Go away!" she said. "They won't let me have any more pets."

The pony watched wistfully as the little girl went home.

## INFAMOUS LAST WORDS

Miss Margaret Phillips, after a term of ~~infamously horrible~~ internship with our magazine, has taken her leave from us, with expressions of mutual esteem and regret — and left behind this note:

### CLOSING LINES I NEVER WANT TO SEE AGAIN

1. GAME OVER.

2. "You mean...?"

"Yes! (a) We will leave no tern unstoned.

(b) A rolling mean gathers no sauce.

(c) He was arrested for making an obscene clone fall."

3. "We're stranded here forever, Adam; our spaceship is ruined. But isn't it a beautiful world?"

"Yes, Eve," he said, pulling her close.

4. . . . and then I woke up.

5. "We want to make peace," he signaled to the gigantic monster.

"Oh! A cockroach!" she cried and stamped on it.

6. "What an awful planet," said the Doctor. "There's nothing of value to our people here."

"Yes," replied the commander, "and what ugly creatures — only two legs and one head!"

7. Amid the ashes, the alien probe that had triggered Atomigeddon still chattered out its message: "*Hello, we want to be friends . . .*"

8. "You'll have to take Creation 201 over if you want to graduate. So better get cracking, Jehovah."

## THE INTERCEPT

by William Gasoway

art: Larry Elmore



## THE INTERCEPT

by William Gasoway

art: Larry Elmore





*William Gasoway's career allows him, his wife, and his three-year-old twin daughters to travel extensively about the U.S. and, so far, the Orient. He likes flying, writing, and computing; but, he confesses, squeezing these pursuits in between work and family can be mildly hectic.*

*He is 27, and this is his first story sale.*

The scramble horn blared, rending the early morning peace. A jolting three-second pulse of sound, it died with the quickness of a heartbeat.

Hack rolled, fell out of bed. Pit was already at the door. "Two-object track, sir. It's fifty miles east of the BZ and inbound."

Hack stared numbly at the CAC controller. Without awaiting a reply, Pit disappeared. Hack shook his head forcibly to clear away the last vestiges of sleep and dressed with practiced speed. The zipper on his flight jacket balked — fumbling with it, Hack almost collided with his wingman, Cowboy, as they both stumbled to the harness rack. Cowboy grinned, his voice tinged with excitement. "Bet I beat you out of the chocks."

Hack began grabbing his gear. "You're on." Survival vest. Harness. G-suit. Hack struggled silently with the awkward equipment. "Pit! Where's —"

Pit was at his side. "Weather's VFR, tower's got your clearance, and here's your alert packs." Pit shoved the bulky checklist into Hack's hand. The vinyl cover was smooth to the touch.

Metal clanged. Cowboy slid down the brass pole. "You're late already, Hack!"

"To Hell with lieutenants," Hack muttered. He hit the pole, dropped, and landed at the bottom in a jog. Cowboy's back disappeared to the left. Hack slammed into the right-hand door and burst into the F-15 alert cell.

The surge of adrenaline was sudden, almost painful. Hack's senses heightened, his breathing shortened. He pounded to the boarding ladder, snapshots of awareness popping in and out of mind with stunning suddenness.

The oily smell of JP-4. Huge cell doors. A chilly Alaskan breeze. An alarm bell. The jet.

Hack didn't stop to admire the clean lines of the Eagle; he slowed up the ladder and clambered into the seat. Close behind, SSgt Williams, his crew chief, slid the shoulder straps into place. With practiced precision, Hack raced through the scramble checklist, hands moving in a sure and steady flow around the cockpit.

JFS. A high-pitched whine filled the cell as the Eagle came to life. 17% RPM — engage #2. Over the hump. Steady. INS. Radar. Engaging #1. Canopy down. Okay — looking good. EBCS. Knocker. Looking for a flasher — not yet. Hack checked his watch. Two and a half minutes into the scramble. He dialed up tower in the UHF radio; he paused a moment to steady his

breathing before transmitting.

"Galena Tower, Alpha Poppa Two-one, scramble clearance on request."

Tower's response was immediate. "Roger, Alpha Poppa Two-one. Clearance available when ready to copy."

Hack pulled a pencil from his left shoulder pocket. "Alpha Poppa Two-one ready to copy."

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, flight of two, is cleared afterburner climb to flight level three-five-zero to the three-zero-zero for one-twenty DME fix from the Galena TACAN. Left turn out of traffic approved. Departure frequency is two-niner-zero-point-niner, squawk five-one-two-one. Call when ready for taxi."

"Roger, copy all." Hack scribbled the clearance — a formality only, as he had already committed it to memory. He checked his INS — the flashing ALN light indicated he had a good alignment. Switch to INS. Where's Cowboy? Hack keyed the mike. "Alpha Poppa Two-one, check."

"Two needs thirty seconds." Cowboy's reply was terse, his voice strained. Hack wondered if he sounded like that over the radio.

"Roger. Tower, Alpha Poppa Two-one, taxi two Eagles."

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, taxi to runway seven, the altimeter is three-zero-one-one."

Hack gave his crew chief the double-thumbs-out sign, the signal for "chocks out." The F-15 lurched forward as the chocks were pulled, and then smoothly rolled out onto the concrete apron of the taxiway. Hack returned the crew chief's salute and noted Cowboy falling into trail behind him. Hack smiled. Nobody, but nobody, beat him on a scramble. As he approached the runway, Hack made one last check of the cockpit. Canopy. Harness. Radar. Flaps. EECS. Master Caution. Flight controls. Hack stirred the stick and watched in his mirrors as the stabilator and ailerons responded. OK. No problems.

He checked the time. Four minutes since the scramble order. Not too shabby! Hack punched the mike button. "Alpha Poppa Two-one, ready for takeoff!"

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, winds are calm. Change to departure frequency, cleared for takeoff."

Hack goosed the throttles slightly to make the turn onto the runway. "Alpha Poppa Two-one, go button five."

"TWO!" No doubt about it, Cowboy was excited. Hack grinned. Heck, so was he.

Continuing his roll, Hack smoothly advanced the throttles to military power, watched the nozzles stabilize, and then pushed into afterburner. The nozzles jumped to full open — Hack checked the other engine instruments as the familiar acceleration pushed him back into his seat. Engines look good. Airspeed — 100 knots. 120. 140. Hack pulled back on the stick. At 160 knots, the Eagle rotated and was airborne almost instantly.

Gear. Flaps. Hold it down. Hack watched the airspeed climb. 240. 280. 330. At 400 knots, Hack increased the pitch angle from a shallow two-degree climb into a screaming 4G pull that left the Eagle standing on her tail. The altimeter kept pace with the climb — barely.

"Departure control, Alpha Poppa Two-one is passing one-zero-thousand for flight level three-five-zero — check."

"Twoo-o-o." Cowboy's check-in oo frequency was a mooosyllabic grunt. Must have caught him in the pull.

Galena Departure Control answered quietly. "Radar contact, Alpha Poppa Two-one. Climb on course. Contact Top Rock on three-ooo-five-point-four, over."

Hack pirouetted the Eagle to on-course; the pitch angle was a steep 70 degrees. Airspeed began to bleed down, decreasing slowly through 370 knots. A "clean" (zero external fuel tanks, zero missiles) F-15 could have maintained speed or even accelerated in such a climb, but the alert configuration (tanks, fuel, missiles) created far more drag than the dual Pratt and Whitney F100 engines could overcome. At 350 knots, Hack ooosed over, gradually decreasing pitch to maintain airspeed.

"Hack, Cowboy. I've got a problem."

"What?" The suddenness of Cowboy's call startled Hack. "What is it?" he asked.

"I can't get my gear up. I'm eight miles in trail, at twelve thousand feet."

Great. A landing gear problem oo an active air scramble! Might as well ask the obvious questions. "Did you reset the circuit breaker and cycle the gear handle?"

Cowboy's frustration was evident. "I've tried that. Twice. No luck. It's not coming up, Hack."

Hack hesitated before answering. There wasn't too much you could do with your gear stuck down — besides land. "OK, Cowboy. Keep trying to get the gear up. If you can, catch me downtrack. If not," Hack paused. Cowboy was not going to like what he had to say next. "Then you're SOL and I'll see you back down on the ground in a couple of hours. Copy?"

"Copy." Cowboy's reply reflected stoic resignation. "Get some good pictures for me."

"Roger." Hack sighed. This would have been Cowboy's first intercept. Oh well, there'd be others. Maybe. "Switching freqs."

"Good luck, Hack."

Hack regretted the loss of his wingman. A two-ship element was far more effective than a single. Not only did a wingman increase the likelihood of survival during wartime, but he often helped to avoid screw-ups in peacetime. And on an active air mission into the Buffer Zone, the last thing Hack wanted was a screw-up.

Hack checked his altimeter. Whoa! — 36,000 feet and climbing. Hack quickly rolled on his back and pulled the jet into level flight at 35,000 feet.

Time to get down to business. Hack switched to manual UHF 315.4. He keyed the mike. "Top Rock, Alpha Poppa Two-one is level three-five-zero. Picture."

Static.

Hack repeated his call.

Static, followed by a faint hiss, was the only reply.

Hack thought he detected a carrier wave through the static, but he couldn't be sure. The switch to a satellite relay system from the old transmitter-booster stations had been a recent one, and there were still gaps in coverage. Hack tried again.

This time, the faraway voice of the Alaskan Regional Operations Control Center, more commonly known as "Top Rock," answered faintly. "Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock, how do you read this transmitter?"

Not well enough, Hack thought. "Alpha Poppa Two-one reads you about three-by, Top Rock. Authenticate Sierra Hotel."

Pause. Hack pictured the GCI controller thumbing through his authentication tables. "I authenticate Delta."

"Roger." Hack bumped his radar out to long range search. Although he was still over 200 miles away from the BZ, he'd might as well start looking. "Who am I talking to?"

"You've got Chainsaw," replied Top Rock.

Good. Hack had worked with Chainsaw on several ACT missions in the past. He was a good controller. "This is Hack. Picture."

"Roger, Hack. Picture is two unknowns, two-seven-zero for two hundred and fifty, tracking zero-niner-zero. Search medium angels. Turn to three-three-zero."

The targets were on Hack's nose, 250 miles distant, yet Top Rock was already vectoring him north. If the targets were Soviet Badger or Bear bombers, then their typical route of flight began with a run straight at the Alaskan coast, followed by a hard turn north to the Pole. If that happened, Hack would be perfectly positioned for the intercept. "Sounds good to me," he murmured as he rolled out on course.

250 miles. That was a long way to drive. Hack settled into his seat and went to work.

Jalred of the West scanned the battlefield far below. Smoke from a hundred fires darkened the sky, and even at this great distance the cries of war wafted faintly on the cool north wind. He studied the runes at his feet — their portent of defeat and death chilled his blood and weakened his bowels. The cause behind this dire prophecy was no mystery. Even now, the principal factor in the runes' equation wheeled and soared above the bloody plain, reaping a bountiful harvest of destruction amidst the confused armies of the West.

A dragon. Jalred shook his head in disbelief at the brash recklessness of

the Eastern magi. To conjure a dragon! Such a thing had not been attempted since the time of Jalred's grandfather, and for good reason. Controlling such a beast was difficult and, in some instances, impossible. More often than not, the dragon turned on its summoners and destroyed them. If this did not happen, and if the dragon accomplished the assigned task, then getting rid of the beast became a matter of prime consideration. No one ever seemed to think of that until it was too late. Sentient, fire-breathing mountains of rock-hard scale and bony talon, dragons did what they pleased after the restraining magic of their callers was exhausted. But thus far, the Eastern magi had done well. The dragon still held to its task of scattering the Western forces. Jalred shuddered. He wondered how long the magi could hold out.

Jalred stood for a moment, transfixed by the deadly grace of the enemy dragon. Reflected sunlight crowned it with harsh brilliance; as a knight on a swift steed, the dragon rode the wind, finding all, sparing none. Gouts of flame, hundreds of feet long, bellowed from its fanged mouth and cindered men and horses alike in mid-stride. Jalred gathered his runes. A battle lost this day ensured the opening of the land bridge between the continents to the Eastern hordes. The magic of the Eastern magi was strong, but Jalred was not ignorant of dragons. The previous dragon so summoned had been successfully banished — by Jalred's grandfather. And what grandfather does not tell his grandson tales? Jalred's memory served him well. Time was short. He bent to his work.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock. Targets turning north, tracking zero-one-zero, bearing two-four-zero, seventy."

"Roger." Thus far, the targets were following the standard track. Hack studied the small map on his kneeboard and attempted to estimate the targets' position in relation to the landmass. His best guess placed the targets just south of Saint Lawrence Island. If their present speed and heading remained unchanged, the intercept would occur near Tin City, a tiny settlement on the tip of the Seward peninsula. The distance between the two continents at that point was a scant 60 miles. Hack dialed up the Nome VORTAC, got a good signal, and checked his INS error deltas — they still looked good. It was essential that Hack navigate accurately inside the Buffer Zone. The BZ was narrowest near Tin City, and he didn't want to inadvertently exit it to the west and bumble into the non-free-flying zone. That was a mistake Hack did not want to make. The Alaskan Air Command battle staff would take a dim view of any pilot who couldn't navigate well enough to stay away from Soviet airspace.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one requesting Buffer Zone clearance."

"Roger Alpha Poppa Two-one, Buffer Zone clearance on request."

Hack changed his radar frame store to two, narrowed his azimuth sweep to twenty degrees, and scaled his altitude coverage down to four-bar scan. He was getting "hits" at the targets' estimated bearing and range, but had

thus far been unable to achieve a lock-on. By concentrating his search in a smaller area, Hack hoped to paint the target sufficiently for a lock.

One scan. Hit. A tiny rectangular white block appeared on Hack's green VSD. Hack deftly positioned a cursor over the block and depressed the TDC, sending the radar into mini-raster scan. No luck. The radar refused to lock. Hack watched the VSD patiently. One, two, four scans. There! Another hit. Hack attempted lock-on; this time, success.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, contact, bearing two-five-zero, forty-five miles, angels two-eight," Hack reported.

"Roger Two-one, contact is target. Buffer Zone entry approved."

"Copy." Hack relaxed. This intercept was proceeding smoothly. He had BZ clearance, contact on the targets, and plenty of gas to remain on station once he completed the intercept. Hack allowed himself a smile. Now if he could only snap some decent pictures with the 35mm camera stowed in his cockpit map case, he'd be golden.

Hack broke his lock-on. He widened the radar coverage, bumped down to forty-mile scope, and watched as the targets marched down the VSD. The range had decreased sufficiently to allow a hit on every sweep of the radar. Periodically, Hack took sample lock-ons, noting the targets' course, aspect, and airspeed: 35 miles, 30 degrees left of the nose, holding to a 130-degree right aspect. Hack banked sharply to the right, adjusting his heading 20 degrees farther north. Good. That ought to heat up the intercept considerably.

"Top Rock shows two targets, echelon formation, two-four-zero, thirty."

Hack fell into rhythm now, as years of training took control. Lock. Sort. Break lock. Sweep. Check aspect. Airspeed. Altitude. Check position. Ten miles from the BZ. Still feet dry. Gas — 15,000 pounds remaining. Plenty. The targets were twenty miles away now, and Hack could easily see an echelon-left formation; the leader was at 28,000 feet, the trailer at 25,000, and the pair was split by approximately two miles.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock shows you entering the Alaskan Buffer Zone. Time is fourteen-oh-one zulu. If radio contact is lost for any two-minute period, vector east and maintain current flight level if above angels two-five or climb to angels two-five or VMC, whichever is higher."

"Roger. Bogey dope," Hack answered.

"Target two-five-zero, fifteen."

That checked. "Judy."

"Roger, judy."

Hack took his final lock-on, selecting the trail aircraft. The intercept was in his hands now, as the "judy" call indicated his intention to complete the intercept without any further assistance from the Top Rock controller. Hack banked, increasing his offset from the target for the final conversion turn to the stern. His attention was directed outside of the cockpit now as he strained to see his target. Twelve miles — tally ho. The bombers — no doubt

about that, only the type remained uncertain — were in the contrail level. Long, thick trails of white vapor streamed behind the planes, making them visible for miles. And 7,000 feet higher, Hack was safely above the contrails, an invisible bullet diving out of the sun.

"Top Rock shows ten miles."

"Roger, tally ho, two targets on the nose."

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, mission is ID, type aircraft only, approach no closer than one nautical mile."

"Copy." Eight miles. The Alaskan coastline surrendered to the gray blue waters of the Bering Strait. At 10,000 feet above his target, Hack began ramping down out of the brilliant azure of the cloudless sky. The Badgers droned on, most certainly aware of the Eagle, but choosing not to react. Six miles. Hack rolled over and began a sweeping nose-low, right turn into the trailer. He squinted through the hunting scope mounted on his head-up display (the scope's official designation was "Eagle Eye") at the silvery shapes of the bombers. Yep, no doubt about it. Badgers.

"Top Rock, Alpha Poppa Two-one identifies targets as two Badgers. Request to close to five hundred feet."

"Copy two Badgers. Request approved. WAO requests tail numbers."

"Standby." Hack snapped the throttles to idle, and increased his G. Grunting slightly through the six-G turn, Hack deftly barrel-rolled to decrease his overtake on the Badger. 12,000 feet. . . . 9. . . . 6. The Badger's tail gun was clearly visible — the barrels canted up in a non-firing position. Hack closed to within 3,000 feet and stabilized. OK. Move in nice and slow. No funny stuff. Hack slid the Eagle closer, pressing to within 500 feet. No sweat. Figures could be dimly seen moving in the Badger's observation ports. Probably taking pictures of me, Hack thought.

"Top Rock, tail number on trailer is zero-nine-one. Trailer is one Badger C."

"Roger, Alpha Poppa Two-one. WAO requests pictures."

"Accomplishing." Hack grinned as he pulled the bulky 35mm camera out of his mapcase. Things were going great. He was golden.

Jalred completed the last line of the pentagram and briskly stepped into its center. Clapping his hands together in the design of the placid mountain, Jalred sought to focus his awareness on the small globe floating serenely before him. The stench of burning flesh was strong in his nostrils as the progress of battle had brought the skirmish line perilously close to his own position. An arrow hummed near his left shoulder; Jalred ignored it. The crystal sphere rose to eye level. Jalred knitted his brow in concentration. Slowly, the globe began to spin.

Jalred's lips mouthed the formulae, first silently, then — as the power of the spell built — aloud, with deepening tone and increasing volume. Writhing sparks of force jumped spasmodically about the globe's smooth surface;

the shining ball began to spin faster, producing a high, unnerving whine.

A spear plunged into the earth at Jalred's feet. He kicked it aside. Sweat dripped from his temples; and his muscles knotted, binding under the strain of the magic. He raised his hands, inverted them, and pushed upward with great force to the sky. The globe, now a small sun too brilliant to gaze upon, shot heavenward. As it rose, it expanded in volume a hundredfold to form a gigantic glistening ball of crackling energy.

The magi of the East turned their attention skyward. Ho! A new development, doubtlessly originated by the Western enemy. Uneasy, the magi sought to warn the dragon of possible danger. Turn away! Fly homeward! Do not engage in battle! The dragon, interrupted from the pleasant task of destroying men, hesitated to consider these messages of retreat. Retreat? From what foe? The dragon climbed in search of this new adversary.

The globe was now larger than the dragon. A hollow golden bubble, it floated motionless on an even plane with the dragon. Neither attacking nor retreating, the shimmering globe mocked the dragon's heretofore unchallenged mastery of the sky.

The dragon circled the shimmering, almost translucent invader. The orb reeked of magic, and the faint glow of unknown energies sparkled at its center. The frantic commands from the mewling Eastern priests became more urgent. Do not attack! It is a trick! We will counter this magic at its source. Return to us at once!

The dragon screamed, defiant. He was prince of the sky — his race had ruled over the miserable groundlings for time immemorial. The Eastern offal who had summoned him thought to restrain him in the face of this challenge — their death would be most gratifying. But first, the globe. Vomiting flame, the dragon arced towards his prey.

Below, Jalred spread his arms wide. The monstrous bulk of the dragon streaked towards the shining sphere. Fire spouted. The globe shimmered. The dragon bore inward —

At the instant of contact, Jalred smote his hands together with a mighty clap. What was once there, was not. In an instant, the sky was clear. A loud boom signalled the inrush of air into the vacuum which remained after the disappearance of the dragon and the orb. Jalred sank to his knees. The wail of the Eastern magi drifted into the empty heavens.

Hack peered through the camera lens and focused. He maintained some margin of control over the Eagle by lightly tapping the control stick with his knees. "Three . . . two . . . one . . . squeeze." The shutter clicked. That ought to be a good one, Hack thought with satisfaction. He prepared for a second shot. Gotta get a high shot — let's see . . . Hack deftly positioned himself high and slightly behind the Badger's right wing. Perfect. Hack sighted again. "Three . . . two . . . one . . ."

With abrupt suddenness, the Badger banked sixty degrees and rolled

away. Hack could see the bomber's wings flex under the sudden pull.

"What?!" Hack dropped the camera and grabbed the stick, executing a high rolling break. On previous intercepts, Hack had experienced problems while taking pictures of Soviet aircraft — sudden speed shifts, course changes, and altitude deviations, but nothing approached the severity of the maneuver which he had just witnessed. The other stuff was all part of the game. Make the American pilot work for his pictures. But this . . . this wasn't playing by the rules.

Hack repositioned high, noting that the lead Badger was also in a hard break turn to the west. Both aircraft were in a thirty-degree dive, and it was obvious that their throttles were firewalled. What the Heli was going on here? Hack locked up the trailer; 5,000 feet and minus thirty knots of closure. Hack pushed up the power. He only had one picture. He'd be damned if he'd let these guys get away.

A shadow blotted out the sun.

Hack paused. There weren't any clouds today. He stretched his neck around and checked high six o'clock.

"Son of a bitch!" Afterburner. Four, five, six G's. The overload warning system beeped loud in his ears, indicating a 92% maximum G. Hack grunted. His vision greyed slightly. Hack fought to keep sight of the incredible thing looming behind him as he sliced the Eagle down in a violent turn. Whatever it was closed rapidly. The Eagle buffeted, and vapor streamed from the wings. 7,000 feet. . . 6. . . 5. Hack cursed. "C'mon, baby . . ." Hack fought down a surge of panic and coolly estimated the range to his attacker. 3,000 feet . . . get ready to jink . . .

It overshot. Hack continued his turn for two seconds, and then reversed. The attacker ignored Hack's reversal and continued on. Hack allowed himself a breath of relief.

A flying lizard. Bigger than a B-52. A gigantic lizard with wings. Hack swore. A *dragon*.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock. Show targets maneuvering west. Confirm."

Hack bit his lip. He'd have to report what was happening, but how could he explain a dragon? "Standby Top Rock. Alpha Poppa Two-one is engaged with a third bandit."

"Identify bandit."

Hack didn't answer. The dragon (?) was now gaining with alarming speed on the retreating Badgers. Hack rolled into trail. Surely the beast didn't intend to attack the bombers. What could it do besides collide with one? In a desperate bid to outrun their pursuer, the Badgers split apart. The dragon gained on the southern aircraft. Hack felt his mouth go dry. This was not happening. It shouldn't be!

The distance closed. Hack hoped the Soviet gunners had enough sense to arm their guns. 3,000. 2,000. Faint tracers spewed from the Badger's rear

and top gun turrets. Still, the dragon continued its Kamikaze attack. Collision seemed imminent.

A gout of brilliant flame spewed from the dragon's mouth. The bomber was immediately engulfed. Hack jerked back in his seat. Not fire-breathing too. . . .

The dragon raked the Badger with its fiery breath and, in passing, pulled into a vertical climb. The flames surrounding the Badger extinguished. Having survived the first attack, the bomber continued its headlong plunge to the sea. Heading for the deck, Hack thought. The dragon will have less room to move down there. Hack pushed the Eagle into a dive to follow. The dragon wheeled for a second pass. Hack licked his lips. The Badger might have survived the first firestorm, but it was not likely to survive repeated assaults.

"Un-damn-believable!" Hack muttered. The situation was not out of hand, but out of this world. Hack badly wanted to call it a day — things weren't looking good and they could only get worse. Hack paused. Run away? Although the Soviets were the "bad" guys, Hack carried no enmity towards the Badger crews. The poor bastards were in the fight of their lives, and the outcome was very much in doubt. They needed help, and at the moment, the only help available was . . . himself.

Hack made his decision. Heck, this might even be fun. Jettison selector — right stores. Hack pushed the red button. The right wing fuel tank fell into the sea. Left wing now. Jettison. Fuel remaining — 12,000 pounds. Enough to fight and get home. Master arm — on. Weapon select — AIM-7F. Radar — supersearch. Hack snapped the Eagle hard over to pursue.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock requests bandit ID."

*You wouldn't believe it if I told you.* "Standby." The dragon began its dive. How in the Hell is it keeping up with the Badger, Hack wondered. His airspeed was 560 knots — the bomber had to be doing at least 500. The dragon's speed was physically impossible. But then, so was the dragon.

A fiery plume erupted once again from the dragon. The Badger disappeared from view, completely engulfed in brilliant flame. The dragon played its breath along the entire length of the bomber, but the Badger continued, unwavering in its course, guns answering back in defiance. The dragon broke away. Hack gave a small cheer. That's it, boys. Kick that thing back where it came from—

The Badger exploded with blue-white brilliance. Momentarily blinded, Hack pulled up and high. He snapped his visor down. Dammit! Hack climbed. His vision cleared. He rolled over and searched for the wreckage. A smudge of smoke over the water marked the dying place of the bomber. Hack knew there would be no survivors.

He looked for the dragon. There, to the north. Hack saw the green-black form streak low over the water, intent on its new prey. The second Badger. Hack rolled in. He estimated his range to the dragon as two and one half

miles. Eschewing supersearch, Hack selected the borsight automatic lock-on mode. A small four-degree circle appeared on the HUD — Hack pulled to place the dragon directly within its center. He waited for the lock. It didn't come. Quickly, Hack selected manual mode, short range search. He scanned the VSD for the target representing the dragon.

One blip. Range five miles. Nope, that was the Badger. Where was the lizard? One, two, three sweeps. One target only, the Badger. No dragon.

No radar cross-section, no chance for a radar lock-on. And any AIM-7F fired without a lock would fly a ballistic trajectory into the sea. Hack's gut went hollow. He was chasing a fire-breathing, 500-knot-plus, flying dragon with stealth capability. Probably has missiles tucked under his wings, Hack thought grimly. This is not my day.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock, maneuver east, I repeat, maneuver east. I show you entering the non-free-flying zone."

Hack glanced down at his INS. He was just crossing the 169 east-longitude line. He had exited the BZ — on the wrong side. Soviet Flagons, fighter-interceptor aircraft, were probably scrambling on him at that very moment. Hack groaned. I'm in trouble now.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, say status."

Hack took a deep breath. "Top Rock, Alpha Poppa Two-one is offensive with third bandit, armament hot, pursuing. One Badger splashed by third bandit." That ought to stir them up back at the battle cage.

There was a noticeable pause. "Uh, roger Two-one. State aircraft type and nationality of third bandit."

"Unknown."

"Roger, standby for further instructions."

*Top Rock if you only knew . . .* the range between the dragon and the fleeing bomber had decreased to two miles. Hack switched to AIM-9M attack mode. The AIM-9M ("Mike" for short) was a heat-seeking missile, the best in the business. A slight hissing indicated the missile in priority was cooled and ready. Hack placed the dragon in the seeker reference circle and waited for the rise in tone (the "growl") that indicated a valid heat source.

Nothing. The slight hiss of the Mike remained steady.

The Badger banked sharply into the dragon. The dragon closed rapidly. Bright points of brilliance — flares — popped steadily out of the bomber's tail section. Chaff bundles burst into silvery clouds of reflective slivers. Wrong tactics, thought Hack. That's not an airplane you're fighting.

A scant 6,000 feet separated the dragon from the bomber, and Hack had drawn to within 9,000 feet of the dragon. Somehow, he had to divert the dragon's attention. There was one way, but the odds of success were long. Very long.

Back to AIM-7F. Hack banked left, trying to isolate the dragon's bulk in the HUD field of view. The Badger was close, but the angular separation was adequate. Maybe. Ready . . . ready . . . fire. One thousand one . . . one

thousand two . . . the Eagle rolled slightly. Trailing heavy white smoke, the missile shot forward and accelerated under boost. Hack grinned, exultant. Go get 'em Big White!

Launched in dumb-flood mode, the AIM-7F continued straight ahead in vain search for its target. A bead of sweat trickled down Hack's temple. While not likely, there was the definite possibility that the missile would successfully lock on to the Badger. Hack mouthed a hasty prayer.

At 3,000 feet, the Badger opened fire on the dragon. The dragon ignored the tracers and swooped down. The smoky finger of the AIM-7 split the pair . . . and exploded. Startled by the firecracker blast in the face, the dragon cartwheeled away. The Badger reversed its turn and leveled off 100 feet above the choppy waters of the Bering Strait.

Hack breathed deeply in relief. As he had hoped, the missile had fused prematurely, causing no harm to the Badger, but stunning the dragon. Hack swept south and maintained a wary distance from the dragon, who had stabilized in a hover high above the water. The flat scaly head whipped back and forth in obvious confusion. Good, Hack thought, at least it can be hurt.

Hack searched for the Badger. It was disappearing to the west, a small dot skimming the waves. They'll have some story to tell their comrades, Hack thought tiredly. Attacked by a capitalist fire-breathing dragon! Hack eyed the flying lizard. The aimless neck movement had stopped; the dragon had recovered its bearings.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock directs immediate RTB. I repeat. Top Rock directs RTB. Vector one-one-zero."

"Alpha Poppa Two-one copies. Am RTB this time." Hack was all too willing to comply with the controller's instructions. The flight had been a disaster from start to finish, and the sooner he was on the ground, the better. Hack tightened his turn and rolled out on the assigned course. Home sweet Galena, here I come.

As a last precautionary measure, Hack glanced over his shoulder at the hovering dragon. It was no longer hovering. Neck extended, wings swept (the thing didn't fly by flapping its wings — it just moved), and tail tucked, the dragon had accelerated into a shallow dive and was once again arrowing to the attack.

Hack's mouth went dry. This time, he was the prey.

"Alpha Poppa Two-one, Top Rock. Say fuel and armament remaining, climb and maintain—"

Hack reached up and clicked off the UHF radio. Sorry, Top Rock, you can't help me. The dragon closed. Hack nosed over and rammed the throttles into AB.

No one could help him now.

Jared struggled to his feet. Having collapsed in exhaustion at the completion of the spell, he was only now able to stand. From the small plateau, he

scanned the smoky battlefield. The Eastern forces had panicked at the sudden disappearance of the dragon. Despite having suffered heavy losses, the Western troops had regrouped and were now bringing the offensive to the confused and dispirited enemy. This was fortunate for Jalred — the battle had swept away from his position.

But the Eastern magi were not defeated. Jalred could sense a strong aura building behind the Eastern lines. In an effort to retrieve their stolen dragon, the magi were weaving a complex web of energy — how they would use it, Jalred could only guess. The dragon had been sucked away into a parallel plane. Reopening that gateway would take much skill and power. Jalred did not doubt that the combined resources of the Eastern magi were equal to the task. It was only a matter of time.

Tired as he was, Jalred began to plan a counter strategy. He could not openly counter the magi's spell; he was far too weak for that. The most he could hope to accomplish was a delaying action. Perhaps, given enough time, the Western forces could reach the knot of Eastern warlocks and scatter them to the winds. Perhaps.

Jalred bent to the dirt and traced the design of confusion — a seemingly aimless, unbroken line with many twists and double crossovers. A proper attack on the magi's spell called for subtlety, but that took time, a luxury he could not afford. Only boldness could achieve his mission in the short span remaining. Jalred girded himself — disorder would be his shield, turmoil his weapon. He probed the aura of the magi, seeking entry. The collective consciousness of his foes was like a dark cloud; lightning bolts of fierce energy flashed within. A shadow within a shadow, he eased into the circle of the magi's conjuring. The activity within was frantic — all attention was focused on the task at hand. An unnoticed guest, Jalred stole about, sowing points of chaos at critical junctions and introducing irregularity into the symmetry of the spell-making. The fact that his discovery was inevitable did not deter Jalred — he was having too much fun to care.

Hack leveled off 200 feet above the water. He checked his fuel — 11,000 pounds. The centerline fuel tank was empty; he jettisoned it. His airspeed climbed. 500. 550. 600. 650. Over the mach. Okay, lizard, match this. Hack checked the dragon's position. No longer gaining, it had stabilized at deep six o'clock, roughly two and one half miles back. Hack shook his head. That thing was fast. He couldn't outrun it. Each engine was sucking gas at a rate of 70,000 pounds per hour, depleting the fuel tanks faster than they could be replenished. If he maintained his present speed, double engine flameout would occur and he'd have to ditch. Hack gritted his teeth. He'd have to fight the damn thing.

Hack slammed the throttles to idle. Speed brake — out. Hack pitched up and left, seven G's crushing his body into the seat. Airspeed decreased. 600. 500. Throttles back into afterburner. Halfway through the turn, Hack

sliced the nose back down. 450. 400. Airspeed increased. 440. 500. 550. Hack rolled out, the dragon now at high twelve o'clock. 6,000 feet. Before the dragon could open its mouth to spew fire, Hack shot under its belly, a silvery flash against the dark sea.

Merge. Take it up. The Eagle rammed skyward in a steep climb. Hack looked back. The dragon arced left in a sweeping horizontal turn. At 400 knots, Hack brought the Eagle over the top and pointed back down at the black form skimming the water. The dragon continued in its turn, oblivious to the threat high above. Good — the bastard's lost sight of me. Hack cut across the circle, decreasing the range rapidly. He eased the throttles back to midrange — gotta control my overtake. 6,000 feet. . . . 5. The dragon's head darted left, then right in search of its lost opponent. Hack slid the throttle weapons selector switch to the full aft position. A gun reticle jumped to life in the HUD. 3,000. 2,000. Hack superimposed the sight over the monstrous, oily back. He squeezed the trigger.

A deep grinding thrum filled Hack's ears as the gun spewed 20mm high-incendiary bullets into the dragon's bulk, 100 rounds every second. The dragon's hard overlapping scales, which had deflected the forward fire of the Badger's guns earlier, afforded little protection against the low-angle, rear trajectory of Hack's attack. The bullets struck plates, slid forward, and hewed into the tough flesh. Golden blood spouted; gaping holes erupted as Hack played the pipper over the dragon's body.

The dragon's roar was immense; it rolled and jinked, desperately striving to shake its attacker. The range had decreased to 800 feet; Hack was close, almost too close. He released the trigger and repositioned. He needed a head shot for a kill. The dragon's neck whipped savagely. Hack concentrated on bringing the pipper in line with the black head. Steady, steady. . . .

The dragon's rosy neck twisted fantastically, and suddenly the head faced rearward. The mouth opened. Blinding flame vomited forth. Immediately, Hack's canopy was sheathed in a curtain of fire.

"Mother—!" Hack hauled back on the stick; the Eagle responded by rolling away, high and to the right, out of the deadly firestorm. Hack waited for an explosion — none was forthcoming. The Eagle was undamaged. Almost.

The canopy. Transparent no longer, it had been melted into milky opacity by the tremendous heat of the dragon's attack. Hack strained for a moment to peer through the fused mixture of glass and plastic — to no avail. He checked the flight instruments. The altitude indicator showed him to be in a nose-high right hand spiral. Can't fight what I can't see, Hack thought. The most important rule of air-to-air combat was a simple one: Lose sight, lose fight. Hack reached forward to a small yellow-striped handle mounted on the left canopy rail. Grasping it firmly, he depressed the small button embedded on its side and jerked backwards.

The explosion was small but loud. The canopy shot up and back, clamshelling into the windblast and tumbling away between the Eagle's dual

tails. Hack hunched over in his seat to protect himself from the 350-knot slipstream howling overtop the forward windscreen. Hack's field of view was clear from the two to ten o'clock positions. However, the front portion of the canopy which still remained blocked Hack's forward vision. That's one Hell of a blind spot, Hack noted.

Hack rolled on his back and searched for the dragon. Wounded, the dragon had extended to the south and was no immediate threat. Hack checked his fuel. 9,000 pounds. He was 300 miles from Galena; he'd need 6,000 pounds to get home. However, Nome was only 75 miles away. In a pinch, he could land there — if he survived.

Hack watched his enemy warily. Having gained a newfound respect for its opponent, the dragon seemed content to rest before again entering battle. Hack pondered his own strategy. Without the canopy, he was exposed. A one- or two-second fireburst could kill or, just as effective, incapacitate him. The result would be the same — an uncontrolled crash into the sea.

Hack's grip on the stick and throttle tightened. He had trained too hard and too long to let a goddamn flying lizard kill him out of hand. There had to be a way to win, but how?

Hack hoped the answer to that question was soon forthcoming. The dragon had finished resting. It rolled in for the final attack.

The end came swiftly for Jalred. Try as he might, Jalred could only slow the progress the magi's conjuring. As the spell neared completion, Jalred became almost reckless in his attempts to disrupt the delicate weave of the incantation. At last, he was discovered. A bolt of energy, scarily bright, blistered towards the nether-he that was Jalred. He fled out of the dark cloud of the magi, but he was not quick enough; the world exploded as the bolt struck home.

Jalred awoke. He was lying prone in the wild grass of the rocky knoll. His head ached miserably. Sitting up, he became sick and could not move for many minutes. Finally, he struggled to his feet. How long had he been unconscious? He did not know, but he hoped it had not been long.

The battle still raged; from his vantage point, it looked as if the West was slowly winning the day. The sun was past its zenith — before it set, the victor would be decided. Jalred probed the Eastern lines. Where he had once felt the ebb and flow of shifting power, there was only a blank void. Jalred's stomach tightened, and for a moment he again felt sick. The absence of a tangible aura could mean only that the spell had been cast. The Eastern magi had rolled the die and only the gods could predict the result.

The wait was not long. A shimmer appeared in the sky, small at first, and then larger. A flat, rectangular window (?), door (?), burst into existence over the war-torn plain. Troops from both sides paused in the bloodletting to crane their necks in wonder. The middle of the shining pane seemed to be centered to the rear of the Eastern lines. Poised over the circle of the magi,

Jalred mused. The purpose of the — Jalred gave it a name: "gate" — was clear. Through it — a gate to the alternate plane — the magi hoped to draw the dragon back into their world. Jalred raised no hand in opposition. His power was spent. He could only watch . . . and hope.

The seed of a plan sprang to life in Hack's mind. Its success hinged on unknown factors and unproved assumptions — not the ideal basis on which to bet his life, but Hack had little time to explore alternatives. He slammed the throttles into AB. As the Eagle jumped forward, Hack lightly rested his index finger on a red button in the center of the front console. From this point, there was no return. Hack pursed his lips in a grim line. Here goes nothing.

He pressed the button. The Eagle pitched up slightly and Hack nursed the stick, easing the jet back into level flight. Emergency jettison. Called the "panic button," the emergency jettison button stripped the airplane of all external stores — tanks, missiles, pylons — and produced a "clean" jet. This was the F-15 that awed crowds at airshows; freed of performance-killing drag, a "clean" F-15 boasted a thrust-to-weight ratio greater than 1:1. The ability to climb faster than any other airplane in existence, it figured heavily in Hack's strategy to defeat the dragon. If I'm wrong, Hack thought wryly, then it's barbecue time!

Hack angled away from the dragon and allowed his airspeed to build. 400. 500. The dragon slowly drifted to six o'clock. 600. 700. Hack smiled. It's showtime! Hack stood the Eagle on end and dove into the sun. The dragon followed, a roaring harbinger of fiery death. Hack stabilized at 75 degrees pitch and checked his mach. 1.2, 1.1, 1.0, .99, .98, .98. The Eagle shot into the crystal-blue sky; the dragon dogged its tail, 7,000 feet behind and closing. The altimeter clicked wildly. 5,000 . . . 10 . . . 15 . . . 20. . . . The extreme cold of the high altitude began seeping through Hack's flight suit. He shrugged it off. If things didn't work out, he'd be warm soon enough.

25 . . . 30. . . . Sharp pains shot through Hack's gut as the wet gases inside expanded under the lessening pressure. The mach began decreasing steadily as the engines produced less and less thrust in the thinner air of the high reaches. Hack trimmed the climb angle in an attempt to compensate. Now came the dangerous part. If he slowed down too quickly, the dragon would close the gap and end his flight with a spout of flame. Hack checked six o'clock. The gap between him and the dragon had narrowed to 4,000 feet. Panicky doubts assailed Hack; he tried to ignore them. He was committed. If death came, he hoped it would be quick.

35,000 feet. A rush of air into his mask signalled the start of pressure breathing. Hack sucked deeply on the flow of 100% oxygen. His bowels felt ready to burst; Hack burped, trying to pass the trapped gas. His head was constantly facing rearward now, his attention riveted on the nightmare that pursued him. Hack began searching for signs that his plan was working, but

there were none. The dragon closed, more rapidly now as the Eagle's climb slowed. 2,500 feet. Hack shuddered. Would there be time?

40,000. 45. Savage cold seared Hack's hands and feet; it would not be long before Hack would lose his ability to control the Eagle. Not that it mattered; a scant 1,500 feet separated Hack and the dragon. An engine coughed; Hack quickly glanced at the gauges. Left FTIT was increasing through 980 degrees Celsius; RPM was winding down past 50%. Hack pulled back on the left throttle and shut down the useless #1 engine. Stagnation. That sealed it. Hack allowed himself a small laugh of despair. Standby for the marshmallow roast.

Hack stole a glance back. The least I can do is spit in its face. With the loss of thrust, the Eagle's trajectory became nearly ballistic. 50,000 feet. The dragon was so near that Hack could easily distinguish the small forelegs jutting from its scarlet chest. The head was a gray arrow poised for the kill. Hack tensed against the oncoming flame.

It never came. Unconscious from lack of oxygen and half frozen in the icy cold, the dragon belled up and began the long descent back to the ground. Hack nearly vomited in relief. His own symptoms of hypoxia — tingling, blurring of vision, mental confusion — were evident. Hack felt his face crack as the corners of his mouth turned upward in a victorious smile. His plan had succeeded, albeit with scant time to spare. I'm not on the ground yet, he reminded himself. He returned his attention to the business of flying.

The Eagle topped out at 51,000 thousand feet. Slowly, it fell off to the left; and, by tapping the rudders lightly, Hack regained control. The Eagle dove, chasing the plummeting form of the unconscious dragon. At 40,000 feet, Hack initiated a restart on the left engine. It obliged and hummed back to life with comforting speed. Hack maintained a wary position on the falling lizard. Please, God, don't let the soo-of-a-bitch wake up.

Passing 25,000 feet, Hack banked right and looked for the water below. Hack chuckled. Ought to make a memorable splash. Hack gazed at the gray green waters below him. . . .

The mottled surface of the Bering Sea disappeared. In its place, a great rectangular shimmering sheet of — tin foil (?), wrapping paper (?) — popped out of nowhere and completely blanketed the area directly beneath the falling pair. The stark realization of imminent collision galvanized Hack into action. Hack placed both hands on the stick and pulled. The sudden force of eight G's blacked his vision. Hack grunted. He pulled harder and hoped.

Hack's vision cleared. He was in level flight at 16,000 feet. He rolled up on one wing and checked underneath the Eagle. The dragon should have splattered by now.

Nothing. Calm, undisturbed water flowed normally below. No dragon. No weird, gigantic sheet of Saran Wrap. Nothing. Hack flipped over on the other wing. As far as he could see, the sky was clear.

The dragon appeared, sudden and ominous, its arrival signalled by a booming thunderclap. The dark form shot earthward out of the shimmering gateway, a chilling apparition returned to complete its rampage of flaming death. A triumphant cheer erupted from the Eastern legions — their champion was with them once again. The magi raised their arms in glee — the destruction of the West was assured.

The shouts of triumph died, the magi stilled their celebration. The dragon's plunge to the ground continued with appalling speed. The magi raised their arms overhead, this time in futile self-defense. The huge bulk crashed down and death silenced the magi's bowl of defeat with abrupt finality.

The ranks of the Eastern army broke. The West seized the advantage and slaughtered them as they ran. Jalred turned his back on the carnage. Victory had brushed perilously close to Defeat. The dragon's death had been, to be sure, a fortuitous event. An interesting mystery to be pondered on the long trek home. Jalred rubbed the rough edge of an unpolished rune stone and slipped into oblivion of deep thought.

Hack ended his search. Nope. Nothing. All traces of the dragon's presence had disappeared. Hack sighed. Time to think about going home. It had been a long flight. The fuel gauge indicated 4,000 pounds remaining. Without a canopy, Hack needed to travel at low altitude; and, with Galena 300 miles away, he'd have to find somewhere else to land. No sweat. He'd pop in at Nome and give the locals something to talk about.

Hack fingered the UHF radio. Should be? No, he'd leave it off. What he needed now was a little peace and quiet. There would be plenty of time for explanations later. Hack thought of Cowboy, and recalled his request for "good pictures." Hack patted the gun-camera film-magazine mounted underneath the HUD. Out of 90 feet, only 40 remained. Brother, did he ever have pictures!

The Eagle cruised homeward into the morning sun.



# The Observatory

by George H. Scithers

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With this issue, *Amazing® Stories*, the world's first science-fiction magazine, is 60 years old — 60 years of uninterrupted publication, which makes us one of the oldest magazines on the newsstand, right up there with *The New Yorker* and *Harper's* and a very few others. We're proud to be that; we're proud to be here.

Science fiction — as a genre — is older than this magazine; indeed, early issues of *Amazing®* were filled with reprints of Wells, Verne, and Poe, as well as of many now-obscure SF writers. But it was Gernsback who gave the genre its name — first SCIENTIFCTION, later SCIENCE FICTION — and a magazine all its own. By doing so, Gernsback gave science fiction an identity which it has to this day; by doing so, Gernsback started to develop the first generation of writers who *knew* that they were SF writers. He started a process of writer responding to writer, idea responding to idea, a process that works to this day, one that gives us our literature of ideas.

Above all, Gernsback was an innovator; he wanted to change things, wanted science fiction to change the world. Now — 60 years later — we can ask, “Did it?”

Well, the landscape, especially some parts of Southern California, does look a bit like the paintings of Gernsback's favorite artist, Frank R. Paul; in a very visible way, we are living in their future now. Early science-fiction stories were indeed about flights to the moon, computers, television (which Gernsback named, but didn't actually invent), robots, organ transplants, descents into the ocean depths (does Captain Cousteau realize that he is a character

from a 60-year-old science-fiction story?), and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence — and none of these are outlandish today.

But like prophets so often do, Gernsback inevitably got many of the details wrong. Probably the most serious error was in thinking that science fiction's primary aim should be to teach science and to predict the future. Instead, science fiction — and Gernsback's magazine, *Amazing®* — has served best to get the people *interested* in science, leaving the teaching to those more qualified. And far more important than predicting the future is the process of exploring *many* futures, first to show that the future will not be just like the present, only with different numbers on the calendar, and second to show that *which* future is a matter of choice — *our* choice.

But again, Gernsback's — and *Amazing®*'s — greatest influence was indirect. Back in 1928 (a year before the present editor was born), Gernsback published “Armageddon — 2419” and a year later its sequel, “The Warlords of Han,” by Philip Francis Nowlan. But Nowlan reached a far greater audience for the adventures of Buck Rogers as a widely-syndicated newspaper comic strip, which — alas — ceased in its original publication in 1967. These ideas are now very much a part of everyone's perception of space, and of the future. What was once known as “that crazy Buck Rogers stuff” now appears as line items in the Federal budget, hiding under a name stolen from a science-fiction movie.

It's been an interesting 60 years.



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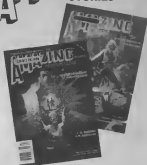
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